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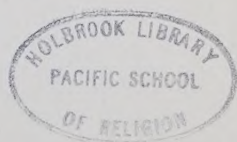
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CANE RIDGE AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

SAMUEL MCCREA CAVERT*

IN ENGLAND during the grim days of war when you went to buy a railway ticket, you were presented with a card which read, "Is this journey really necessary?" The same question occurred to me when Dr. Montgomery asked me if I would come from New York for the dedication at Cane Ridge. I quickly decided that for me this trip was a "must." In coming to Cane Ridge I feel that I am making no ordinary journey but a devout pilgrimage. For it is not for Disciples of Christ alone that this old meeting house stands as an historic shrine. Christians of every name who are concerned for the unity of the church must think of Cane Ridge with reverent gratitude. In this day when interest in Christian unity is much more widespread we need to be reminded that here, more than 150 years ago, a voice was raised for the union of divided churches—a voice so clear and prophetic that in some respects it has not yet been surpassed.

When the story of a United Church is some day written, I have no doubt that the name of Barton W. Stone will stand in the forefront of its American pioneers. In a time of bitter religious controversies he sounded a clarion appeal for a point of view more worthy of those who professed loyalty to the same Christ. In a time of complacent sectarianism his outlook took in the whole body of Christ's people. He protested against what he aptly called the spirit of "partyism." His plea for Christians "who differ in opinion to live together in love and union" we still need to hear and heed. His insistence that a common relation to Christ makes the fellowship and unity of all Christians a spiritual imperative goes to the very heart of what we today think of as the ecumenical movement.

In the spirit of Barton W. Stone let us consider the problem of unity as it confronts us now. That there has been real progress dur-

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ing the century and a half since his day there can be no doubt. The tiny acorn which he planted has become—if not a mighty oak—a considerable sapling! In his generation Christians were zealous to prove that other denominations than their own were wrong and to combat that wrongness. It was an era of *controversy*. A succeeding generation recognized that other denominations than one's own had insights that ought not to be lost. So there was an era of *toleration*. Then came a generation that was ready to join hands with other churches in common endeavors. This introduced an era of *co-operation*. It is this era that we are living in. The question which our age must now face is whether we are to move on beyond co-operation to an era of *union*.

In this development from conflict to fellowship Barton W. Stone's spiritual descendants have had an honored role. During the forty years in which I have been associated with the movement of interdenominational cooperation, I have had a special opportunity to see, and be grateful for, the part that the Disciples of Christ have played. I have come to think of them both as historic forerunners and as contemporary stalwarts in the entire program. In this connection I am tempted to personal reminiscences of those of your brotherhood who have been a great inspiration to me—from Peter Ainslie to Riley Montgomery—but the number of those whom I would have to mention is so great that I dare not start.

The right point at which to begin any discussion of Christian unity, for today and tomorrow, is to recognize the unity which we already have. In the deepest sense of the term, unity is not an ideal which we formulate and then set out to achieve. It is a present spiritual reality grounded in the nature of God. It is something which actually exists—not because of what we have planned or done but because of what God has done through Christ. All who are united to Him are thereby united to the other members of His family, whether they recognize the family connection or not. So in its ultimate meaning we do not create Christian unity—we can only express it. We seek to act as one, because we truly *are* one at the deepest level of Christian experience.

This unity which we possess by virtue of a common relation to Christ is not merely a matter of human gregariousness or good-natured sentiment. There is a basic unity of faith and conviction. You can see this, in spite of all our differences, if you compare the

Christian interpretation of life, in whatever denomination, with the secular interpretation of life. By "secular" I mean that view which presumes to explain everything without any reference to God and without any awareness of the significance of Christ for the world. At this decisive point all Christians, however separated in other respects, stand together on the same side. There is, indeed, a dividing line but it is not between one group of Christians and another group of Christians. The dividing line is between those who believe and those who do not believe that God is the sovereign reality of the universe and that in Jesus Christ He has entered into human life for man's redemption.

This unity which we already have comes to organized expression in the ecumenical movement of today. It is a movement, we have to admit, which is not yet widely understood or appreciated. Probably the average layman has hardly even heard of the word ecumenical. The average pastor, absorbed in the responsibilities of his parish, is likely to assume that ecumenical concerns can be left to a few officials who have interdenominational and international contacts and who "like that sort of thing." To both layman and pastor "ecumenical" too often suggests something in the ecclesiastical stratosphere rather than a down-to-earth aspect of his Christian life.

Insofar as this is true, the ecumenical movement is not yet of great practical consequence. If it is not significant to the members of a church in Lexington, Kentucky, it is not significant at all. For, as G. K. Chesterton once pithily remarked, "Nothing is real until it is local."

But I am convinced that the ecumenical movement has direct and momentous meaning for every local church. The reason for this is that it enlarges the very meaning of membership in the church. The ecumenical movement has come into being not because of clever organizers or promoters, but because Christians in our time are making a new discovery of the church in some of its vital aspects. I suggest three ways in which the ecumenical movement enriches the idea of what it means to belong to the church.

For one thing, the ecumenical movement relates the members of any church to a world-wide church. They begin to see themselves as part of a great fellowship which is more than local, more than American, more than western, which reaches around the globe and embraces men and women of every nation and race and culture.

This is made visible in the fact that the World Council of Churches includes 165 different denominations in 50 countries of all five continents. This is something new. Our century is the first in which there has been a world Christian community. This is what the late Archbishop Temple even called "the great new fact of our time."

Is it not a tremendous thing that at a time when most people are cynical about the possibility of any world society, the Christian Church has actually become a world-wide community, at least in embryo, relating millions of men and women to each other at the deepest spiritual level of their lives. We must, of course, guard against making too sweeping a claim for it as it now stands. The nationalistic spirit and the racialistic spirit still compete with the ecumenical spirit, but not all their excesses have been able to prevent the rise of a world-wide church. Through the ecumenical movement, every local congregation can be a conscious part of this world fellowship.

For a second thing, the ecumenical movement enlarges the meaning of church membership by relating a congregation to other historic branches of Christianity. Some of them are as new as the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa, formed only a few years ago. Others are as old as the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, which trace an existence back to New Testament times. Some of them are as simple in worship and structure as the Quakers; others have as elaborate a liturgy and hierarchy as the Eastern Orthodox. Some of them—like the Coptic Church of Egypt or the Mar Thoma Church of India, for example—seem so strange that we find it difficult to understand them. When, however, we begin to realize that they have kept the lamp of Christian faith burning through the centuries in the midst of non-Christian environments, and even anti-Christian pressures, we are less impressed by their strangeness than by their Christian witness. They are in the World Council not just because of an amiable desire to take in everybody, but because we perceive that in these churches, too, the Holy Spirit has been at work. We begin to discover that the things in which we differ are the things of lesser moment and that what we hold in common—our faith in Christ—is of transcendent importance. Thus the ecumenical movement helps every Christian to say, with fuller meaning, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints."

For a third thing, the ecumenical movement relates the local church to a united and world-wide effort to bring Christian influence to bear on the complex problems of society. It does not reflect the kind of pietism which can separate personal faith and morality from responsibility for the character of the civilization in which we are to live. George McLeod, of the Iona Community in Scotland, has even said that the ecumenical movement might almost be defined as the churches trying to learn together what it means to affirm the Lordship of Christ over all of life.

This is not a point of view which it is easy for a local parish, standing alone, to maintain. It is always tempted to become so pre-occupied with its own members that it lacks a deep sense of mission to the community at large and to the world. But without that sense of mission it misses the great apostolic note. That sense of mission must include the permeating of all our social and cultural forces with the spirit of Christ. As Alan Walker of Australia has recently suggested, when our Lord bade us to "Go into all the world" he surely was thinking in more than geographical terms. He was, in effect, saying to us: "Go into the world of economics, go into the world of politics, go into the world of international affairs, and preach the gospel." To this kind of world mission the local church can feel itself vitally related as a part of the ecumenical movement.

All that we have said thus far refers to a unity which we already have, or at least may have, within the present framework of our denominational patterns. It is reflected in our increasing processes of working together with common purposes in common tasks. But is this our goal, or must we go on to raise a question about the denominational system itself? Are we to think of our present structure of separated and wholly independent denominations as an adequate fulfilment of our Lord's prayer for the oneness of His people? With Barton W. Stone we must answer *No*.

As the Evanston Assembly of the World Council pointed out, there is a painful contradiction between the unity-in-Christ which we all profess as Christians and the disunity which we all practice as churches. We dare not gloss this over. The fundamental concern, of course, must always be our unity of spirit, rather than a unity of organization. But no spirit is going to seem real or powerful so long as it is disembodied. If the world is really to believe in the oneness

of Christ's people, that oneness must somehow become visible. And this means some form of embodiment, some coherent structure. Otherwise that oneness is needlessly obscured from the world.

Our discussions of church union are usually carried on at too low a level. We often create the impression that we are interested in it only for the sake of efficient administration, or even bigness in itself. But the true concern for unity goes to the very heart of the gospel and to the very center of our faith. The great reason for the unity of the church is that the world desperately needs to know the power of Christ to unite all mankind in a fellowship of love. But how can we convince a divided world that Christ can thus reconcile and unite unless we can first demonstrate that uniting power in the life of the church itself? It is this consideration which should prevent us from being satisfied with the measure of unity that we have attained. It is this consideration which should make us grateful that the witness of Cane Ridge still lives.

BARTON WARREN STONE (1772-1844): A NEW TYPE ON A NEW FRONTIER

By

HOWARD ELMO SHORT

A CENTURY and a quarter ago, Barton Warren Stone, writing on the nature of the ministry said,

When the church is satisfied that any person is called of God to preach the Gospel, it is their duty to encourage and forward him to the work. This they may do by their presbytery, as representatives of the church, as is common in the Presbyterian government; or they may do it in a church capacity, as is done by the Independent and Baptist churches.

Stone was not a Baptist; he had been a Presbyterian. By this time, 1827, the Presbyterians were sure he was not one of them. The trouble had come about when Stone and four other ministers in the State of Kentucky had withdrawn from their respective presbyteries in 1803, and founded one of their own, the Springfield Presbytery. Concerning the attitude of the Synod toward this action Stone wrote:

To suspend us for constituting a separate presbytery, is not this to cut off at a blow every minister since the Reformation?

The view of Stone was that the Westminster Confession of Faith should be open to continual scrutiny by the believer, and that the terms of Procedure provided the privilege of such action. Presbyteries, synods, general assemblies were all considered to be voluntary associations, and not co-authoritative with scripture, as Stone looked back on the 1803 procedures, in 1827. Ordination by a presbytery was not a mutual agreement in doctrine and principle between the candidate and the members of the Presbytery, in Stone's thinking. He wrote:

In all this, the church confers no power, human or divine; but only the privilege of exercising the power and authority, which they believe he has received from God, in that particular society. This privilege, the church may

recall; the candidate may forfeit or voluntarily resign. *But neither the refusal of the church, his own forfeiture, or resignation of that particular privilege, can disannull the original call of God, or the obligation of the candidate to obey.* (Italics mine)

In November, 1826, as a preacher in an independent Christian church in Georgetown, Kentucky, Stone began the publication of *Christian Messenger*, which appeared monthly, when he was able to produce it. The fourth issue began a series entitled *History of the Christian Church*. After two articles, the last four appeared as *History of the Christian Church in the West*. Under this title, six articles have been reprinted by *The College of the Bible Quarterly* as a 53 page booklet. (Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, January, 1956, Lexington, Kentucky.)

The re-publication of these articles prompts further references to Stone's life and work. Two years earlier a rather definitive study of William Garrett West appeared under the title, *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, 1954). In the introduction to the book, Dean Luther A. Weigle says of Stone: "He was a 'grass root' practitioner of Christian unity rather than a debater about it." This is no doubt a reference to the action of Stone and five others who signed *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* in June 1804, and similar later action of Stone in an undenominational cooperative, direction.

Barton Warren Stone was born near Port Tobacco, Maryland, December 24, 1772. Obviously, his childhood was spent in a time of social upheaval. In the midst of the American Revolution, his widowed mother took her large family of children to the frontier near the Dan River, near the Virginia-North Carolina border. In later life he wrote of the life-long feelings he retained of the patriotic speeches on liberty, of the mingled sorrow and pride evoked by the departure of his brothers for the battle, and of the way even the mention of the word Tory, affected him.

Stone had a long, difficult time in coming to religious maturity. His early boyhood days in Pittsylvania County, Pennsylvania, saw the Anglican church, of which his mother was a member, closed, because the Scotch-Irish community suspected all such as being English sympathizers. But there was no lack of religious services. These were all of the revivalistic sort. In his first full-time pastorate, years later

was to lead the most famous of all such frontier revivals, the one Cane Ridge, in Kentucky, in 1801. His own struggle must have convinced him of the necessity or the possibility of such a procedure.

Religious conflict was present in this early situation since the rivalists had opposite views of their purpose. The Methodists were Arminian in theology, and they preached a "whosoever will" message. Less than ten percent of the population belonged to any church. The picture of things to come was depicted so vividly that many a sinner was converted, being assured that the choice of heaven or hell was up to him.

The Baptists were Calvinistic (Stone mentions Samuel Harris, Cotton Lane and S. Cantrell), emphasizing obedience to God's will and Christian ethics as a sign of one's election. They called the Methodists "the locusts of the Apocalypse." Stone gave mental assent to their preaching, and was impressed by their practice of immersion. The total effect of the conflict between the groups however, was to discourage Stone's daily prayer and his search for a satisfying religious experience. He gave up praying, and began to engage in "the youthful sports of the day."

At this moment, the father's legacy was divided among the children, and the fifteen year old Barton decided to use his share in securing a liberal education, and to point toward a career in law. But the church for religion was not to be laid aside for long.

February 1, 1790, Stone entered the academy at Guilford, N. C., conducted by Dr. David Caldwell. He planned to sleep six or seven hours a night and to study the rest of the time. Religion got in the way almost immediately.

James McGready, a powerful Presbyterian preacher had just conducted a revival there, and some thirty converted students held a daily prayer meeting. In order to hew to the previously chosen line, Stone associated with the students who cast "their jests at the pious." His conscience made him extremely uncomfortable, as a result. Only a stormy day prevented his decision to leave the school.

Then James McGready returned to the campus. His admonitions to flee from the wrath to come seemed to Stone to be directed at him. McGready won. Stone resolved to "seek religion." For more than a year he tried to fit the pattern of the day—to become unconscious of the presence of the regenerating Spirit which brings about repentance. Finally, a sermon on, "God is love," preached by William Hodge brought the understanding he needed. He confessed his sins to God, and spent the rest of his life serving him.

In 1793, Barton Stone became a candidate for the Presbyterian ministry, in the Orange Presbytery, North Carolina. He began study under the direction of William Hodge. Now further trouble was in store. He was given a book written by Herman Witsius, a Dutch theologian, which "explained" how the one God is equally worshipped as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Stone had never read theology, and the Trinity became "an incomprehensible mystery" to him until he read a treatise by Isaac Watts which he understood and accepted.

Stone seems to have been an unlikely candidate for licensure, but this is only partially true. The examination of candidates before the Orange Presbytery was conducted by the Rev. Henry Patillo, who sympathized more with Watts than with Witsius, and he led Stone quickly over the hurdle of the Trinity.

There now followed another year of despair, sickness and uncertainty. As a teacher in a Methodist academy at Washington, C. he attended Methodist ministers' meetings, and also kept close to a near-by Presbyterian minister. The spring of 1796 found him again before the Orange Presbytery, where he was licensed. He was appointed to "ride and preach" in the lower part of North Carolina, but the year found him also in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky.

It was in the latter state that he was to do his most significant work, and to assume the positions of thought and action that were to produce one wing of the current movement known as the Disciples of Christ.

Through the Presbytery of Transylvania, the Churches at Cave Ridge and Concord, Bourbon County, Kentucky, called Stone to be their pastor, late in 1798. By this time he had preached for them ten years, except for time out for a trip south, and a visit to his mother. He now faced the prospect of ordination as a Presbyterian, and the earlier theological problems forced themselves upon him again.

The actual ordaining council was without incident. The usual question was asked: "Do you receive and adopt the Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible?" Stone's unusual answer was, "I do, as far as I see it consistent with the word of God," but no objection was raised and he was ordained. This question shows that doubt was present in his mind, although he wrote later that, "at that time I believed and taught, that mankind were so totally depraved that they could do nothing acceptable to God till his Spirit . . . had quickened, enlightened and regenerated the heart."

The Cane Ridge revival provided the answers to some of Stone's questions. The extraordinary physical phenomena were not remembered as necessary signs of conversion in the later independent churches, but they did point out the ability of man to act and to make decisions. Afterward,

The distinguishing doctrine preached by us was that God loved the world—the whole world—and sent his Son to save them, on condition that they believed in him; that the gospel was the means of salvation, but that this means would never be effectual to this end until believed and obeyed by us; that God required us to believe in his Son, and had given us sufficient evidence in his Word to produce faith in us, if attended to by us; that sinners were capable of understanding and believing this testimony, and of acting upon it by coming to the saviour and obeying him, and from him obtaining salvation and the Holy Spirit.

The Cane Ridge meeting was called by the Presbyterian ministers. Methodists and Baptists joined in full fellowship. Ministers of all faiths preached. They "engaged in singing the same songs of praise, all united in prayer, all preached the same things—free salvation urged upon all by faith and repentance."

Church fellowship had been on the basis of the acceptance of the same doctrinal views. It may be said that these early nineteenth century revivals were conducted on that basis also, but new lines were drawn. In each denomination there were those who were called Calvinists, believing in election and the inability of man to act in his own behalf. The revivalists were considered Arminian, believing that faith and repentance were available to all, and that man must act to receive God's blessing.

Stone loved these signs of unity:

The doctrine preached by all was simple, and nearly the same. Free and full salvation to every creature was proclaimed. All faith in the gospel, and obedience to it, as the way of life. All appeared deeply impressed with the ruined state of sinners, and were anxious for their salvation. The spirit of partyism, and party distinctions, were apparently forgotten. The doctrines of former controversy were not named; no mention was made of eternal unconditional election, reprobation, or

fatality. The spirit of love, peace, and union, were revived. You might have seen the various sects engaged in the same spirit, praying, praising, and communing together, and the preachers in the lead. Happy days! Joyful seasons of refreshment from the presence of the Lord!

Some people never got beyond the external phenomena of revivals. "Signs," physical excitement, were to be required as evidence of the presence of the Spirit. Stone made no such emphasis in the future. Others were soon caught in the web of doctrinal statements of the new religion. Stone avoided creedal statements of faith and tests of fellowship. Even the valid interest in the conversion of sinners did not claim first attention with Stone. It was the vision of the unity of existing Christians in one body that Stone took away from Cane Ridge.

Kentucky was the new frontier, and Stone was a new type of preacher who was not satisfied to be a Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist. He just wanted to be a Christian.

At this point a neutral historian is called for. A brief digression therefore may be permitted. Probably the majority of the present-day Disciples of Christ, who generally call their local congregations Christian Churches, feel that Stone's hopes were at least partially realized. This church much prefers to be called a Brotherhood of "communion." Current writing in the church has a good portion of the material which disclaims any characteristics of a denomination. Others may admit similarities, but they are likely to be disowned by "New Testament Christians."

On the other hand, the churches which existed before Stone began his work, now readily accept the Disciples of Christ, locally and in the wider circles, as a sister denomination. They see all the characteristics of a separate body in the Disciples which they themselves possess. They do not feel any less Christian than the "Christians." Indeed, one finds some in nearly every church body who feel that they are the "only Christians." So, the "Christians" who feel unique about their "New Testament Christianity" are thought to be farther away from the truth than the Disciples of Christ who will fellowship with the various denominations.

These are matters that cannot be resolved in this discussion about Stone. The best that can be done is to tell the rest of his story, and leave an analysis of the events and their ultimate consequences as

Barton W. Stone and his confreres were not long satisfied with their Springfield Presbytery, organized in 1803. Having claimed "to take the Bible alone as the only standard of faith, practice and discipline," Stone wrote later, "it was frequently cast up to us that we were much a party as others, having assumed a party name, the Springfield presbytery."

So, they met at Cane Ridge, June 28, 1804 and: "agreed to cast aside our assumed name, and power, and to sink into the general body of christians, taking no other name than christians." This proposal was announced in *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, referred to above. This document became the first of a series in which the best early statements of the positions of the whole Disciples movement are to be found.

Efforts of the 1804 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to reconcile the differences with this little body of Christians which now disclaimed any organizational relationship with them, were of no avail. It is interesting to note, however, that Stone, Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, and John Thompson "attended the call of a committee with the Synod at Danville, October 1804." They answered the questions put to them and ended with this proposal.

Notwithstanding we conceive we can propose a method of accommodation, which, with the divine blessing, will heal the division, which subsists between both the ministers and people throughout the bounds of the Synod of Kentucky, as follows:

1. Let us remember that all Christians are one in Christ, members of his body, partakers of his nature and heirs of the kingdom: Therefore they have no power over one another to cut off, exclude, or unite.
2. Let us pray for more of the uniting, cementing spirit.
3. Treat differences in lesser matters with christian charity and mutual forbearance, and bend our united force in the common cause.
4. Give up care of the church to God by constant fervent prayer—counsel, advice, admonish, reprove, comfort and strengthen one another as necessity may require, in the spirit of love and meekness. Then will be accomplished that saying, that of the rest durst no man join himself to them.

Nothing came of this proposal. In due season, Richard McNemar and John Dunlavy, signers of the *Last Will and Testament*, "wensnared to their ruin" by the Shaker movement which came i Kentucky. Robert Marshall and John Thompson returned to Presbyterian church. S. Westerfield and H. Andrews, two oth early leaders, joined the Methodists. Only David Purviance, first man to be ordained by the new movement, remained with Sto

Stone wrote in 1827 that, "the loss of these brethren we grea lamented," but that, "from that time we have lived in peace a harmony among ourselves . . . (and) our numbers from a hand have swelled to many thousands."

In the years that followed, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) Scotch-Irish immigrant to Washington County, Pennsylvania, 1809, following the coming of his father, Thomas Campbell, two ye earlier, was destined to be the outstanding leader and organizer the Disciples of Christ. By August, 1830, the little flock which h withdrawn from the Presbyterian church and formed the Christ Association of Washington (Pa.), had been in and out of the Redsto Baptist Association, in the Mahoning Baptist Association (Ohio) and had so captivated the latter body that they voted its dissolution.

The "Reforming Baptists" of the Campbell group came to K tucky, and southern Ohio, where they met the "Christians," of Ston group. They discovered their similarities. In due season, the chur of which Stone was minister in Georgetown, Kentucky, and a chur of the Campbell tradition at Great Crossing, four miles away, cal a meeting of both groups for Christmas week, 1831. This led to meeting on New Year's Day, 1832, in Lexington, after which Sto wrote in his *Christian Messenger* that, "we are happy to announce our brethren, and to the world, the union of Christians in fact in c country."

This union was no more and no less than the attending peo wished to make it. Ecclesiastical machinery was non-existent. T men present, one from each side, John Smith and John Rogers, w asked to ride among the churches and urge them to unite. Many o so. Stone was enthusiastic about future prospects that all churc in the two groups would unite, for "they all profess the same faith they all reject human creeds and confession— . . . they all prof the same one Lord, the Son of God, and Saviour of sinners . . . th all profess the same one immersion."

Something should be said here about Stone's specific ideas the name, and on baptism. As early as 1804, Stone was convinc

at the name Christian was enough, for a church or a person. Henry Attillo, he who led Stone over the theological hurdles at licensure, had put the idea in his mind. Also, Rice Haggard, who later joined Stone in Kentucky, wrote a pamphlet advocating *The Sacred Support of the Christian Name*, which clinched the decision.

As the years went on, local churches most often followed Stone's choice of a name, while Campbell's preference of "Disciples of Christ" more scriptural became a more common group name for the whole body of churches.

Following the accepted method of reading the scripture independently of former doctrines or creedal positions, Stone writes that, "number of us . . . had received the conviction that immersion was the Apostolic mode of baptism, and that believers were the only proper subjects of it." This view was fully shared by Campbell. There was no agreement on the time element. Stone wrote, "It was unanimously agreed that every brother and sister should act according to their faith; that we should not judge one another for being baptized, or for not being baptized in this mode."

They preached believers' baptism, by immersion, to members and non-members, so that Stone could write in 1827, "There is not one in 100 among us who has not been immersed." The ministers didn't all agree. Some were "dissatisfied that their congregations were submitting to this ordinance." Others were so sure of its validity that they demanded it of everyone. Stone's primary interest in unity made him believe that oneness was possible, if the brethren would love one another.

The last article in the history series which Stone printed in the *Christian Messenger* closes:

We are yet warmly opposed and spoken against everywhere. We trust in the living God, and labor to be accepted of him not doubting but that on the ground we now occupy, the whole church of God on earth will ultimately settle.

How often, by what diverse people, this statement has been made! While this article was being prepared the writer read a fervent plea by a follower of Stone for present day Disciples of Christ to hold firmly to a position of isolation because we are on the verge of triumph. Unhappily, we have a file of similar or identical statements a dozen others, each pleading for his own variety of New Testament Christianity.

Stone's hopes were not realized, of course. Current history proves that, both within the Disciples of Christ, and in the church world in general. We like to feel that his spirit of fellowship and cooperation is still abroad in the land.

No attempt has been made to give a complete biography of Barton W. Stone, except as events in his life affected the Christian movement. In fact, not all of his life story is known. He was a minister in Georgetown, Kentucky, perhaps from 1813 to 1834. Then he settled in Jacksonville, Illinois. He re-visited Cane Ridge in 1838. He died at the home of a daughter in Hannibal, Missouri, November 9, 1884, while on his way back to Jacksonville from a district meeting in Missouri. His body is buried at Cane Ridge, in Kentucky.

Stone left no theological systems or tomes. He did not wish to leave a church organization or denomination. He was a simple Christian, who loved Christians, and wished fellowship with them. Of course, he hoped every Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist would see things the way he did. They felt the same about him. Perhaps his emphasis on Scriptural names, Scriptural practices and the kind of unity between Christians which exists between the Father and the Son, has been helpful in bringing twentieth century Christians into closer fellowship. Disciples of Christ think so.

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL AND CHURCH UNITY

By

ROLAND H. BAINTON

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL has the singular distinction of being the only Christian reformer whose achievement was the denial of his intention. He sought to unite all of the evangelical churches and instead founded one more. To a degree a similar anomaly is discoverable also in Martin Luther who set out to reform Christendom and ended by rending Christendom. Or again in John Wesley who endeavored to revive the Church of England and headed secession from the Church of England. Nevertheless, in the case of these latter two, the discrepancy is not so glaring. Luther did reform, even though he divided, and Wesley did revive, even though he seceded. But Alexander Campbell sought to unite and increased division.

The outcome cannot altogether be regarded as a malign trick of capricious fate. There was something of the same anomaly in the man's deportment, because he sprayed the blight of Christian divisions with vitriol. He was an artist in denunciation, ridicule and satire, and willed in debate whether with Owen the Infidel, Purcell the Roman Catholic Bishop, or Rice the Infant Baptist. Public disputations in those days were a great popular diversion, the equivalent among the sports of the race track and the prize ring, and Alexander Campbell was a heavy weight champion. The story is told that Bishop Vardeman, having been selected to moderate a debate in which Campbell was to defend immersion, was traveling in a gig to Washington over a muddy road when he overtook a man on foot and remarked to the traveler that he must have very important business to be trudging to Washington through such weather. The man answered that he was going to hear Campbell debate. Vardeman, suspecting that the man might be on the opposite side, sought to twit him by suggesting that Campbell might whip his champion. The man answered that if this were the Mr. Campbell whom he had heard of on a previous occasion then "all creation cannot whip that Mr. Campbell."¹

He was adept at satire, which is an admirable weapon in debate, but not often an instrument of conciliation. Here is an example of

¹ Robert Richardson, *Memorials of Alexander Campbell*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, 1833), II, p. 73.

his counsel to preachers: "Let your sermon be full of 'the entire words of man's wisdom,' and let it be beautified with just divisions with tropes and with metaphors, and with hyperbole, and apostrophe and with interrogations, and acclamation, and with syllogisms, with sophisms. . . .

"Take good heed to your attitudes and your gestures, know when to bend and when to erect. . . .

"Let your voice at times be smooth as the stream of the valley, soft as the breeze that waves not the bough on its banks; and at times let it swell like the wave of the ocean, or like the whirlwind on a mountain top.

"Then shall you charm the ears of your hearers and their hearts shall be softened, and their minds shall be astounded, and their souls shall incline to you; and the men shall incline to you, and likewise the women; yea, to your sayings and to your persons shall they be inclined.

"And be you mindful not to offend the people; rebuke you not their sins. . . .

"If a brother shall raise up the banner of war against brothers and Christians against Christians, rebuke them not. . . .

"If any man go into a foreign land and seize upon his fellow man and put irons on his feet and irons on his hands, and bring him across the great deep into bondage; nay, if he tear asunder the dearest ties of nature, the tenderest leagues of the human heart; if he tear the wife from the husband, and force the struggling infant from its mother's bleeding breast, rebuke him not!

"And although he sell them in foreign slavery to toil beneath the lash all their days, tell him not that his doings are of Antichrist; for lo! he is rich and gives to the church."²

The first part of this declamation might not have stung, since but few would have applied the strictures to themselves, but the castigations on the slave-trade and war might easily have provoked resentment.

This passage is an example of his style. It does not, of course, apply to divisions among Christians. But here is another example which strikes directly at the Baptists, the very group with whom for a time he was in the closest affiliation. He is parodying an account of an ordination as given in the *Latter Day Luminary*. Here is Campbell's rendering:

² *The Christian Baptist* II, 1824. I have used the 12th edition of 1856 in this volume, pages 167-68.

"On Wednesday, the 11th of June, A. D. 44, the Rev. Saulus Paulus and the Rev. Joses Barnabas were set apart as missionaries to the Gentiles dispersed throughout the world, by a committee of the board of managers of the Baptist General Convention, met in the city of Antioch. An interesting sermon was delivered on the occasion by the Rev. Simon Niger, from *Isaiah* vii, 4. 'The isles shall wait for his law.' Rev. Lucius of Cyrene led in offering up the consecrating prayer. Rev. Manaen gave Mr. Paulus and his companion (Mr. Barnabus) an appropriate charge; and the Rev. John Mark gave them the right hand of fellowship. . . . The Rev. Lucius of Cyrene offered up the concluding prayer. The services were performed in the Rev. Simon Niger's meeting-house. The day was fine, and the assemblage was very large, and proved, by their fixed and silent attention to the services, how much they felt for the world that lieth in wickedness; and by a collection of \$86.25 cents, they showed a willingness to aid the Rev. Mr. Paulus and the Rev. Mr. Barnabas in carrying the gospel to the heathen.

"Mr. Paulus is a young man, and a native of the city of Tarsus; he received his classical and theological education in the theological seminary in Jerusalem. He appeared before the committee a man of good sense, of ardent piety, and understandingly led by the spirit of God to the work in which he has now engaged."³

This passage to be sure comes from Campbell's earliest and most primonious period. A number of points are pilloried. One is the use of titles for ministers. Reverends and Right Reverends were unknown in the days of Peter and Paul.⁴ Will Satan, Campbell demanded, be routed by an army of D. D.'s?⁵ Incidentally, four of the disciples at Yale have earned the degree of Ph. D. by writing about Alexander Campbell.⁶ Another point was that missionaries should not be paid,⁷ that church gatherings should not be in fixed meeting-houses,⁸ that ministerial candidates should not receive special training or should they be conscious of a call from God. Rather, they should

³ *Ibid.*, I, 1823, edition of 1856, p. 17.

⁴ Selma Huntington Campbell, *Home Life and Reminiscences of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis, 1882), p. 436.

⁵ Robert Frederick West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven, 1948), p. 27.

⁶ West, *ut supra*.

Denton R. Lindley, *The Structure of the Church in the Thought of Alexander Campbell*, 1947, unpublished.

Harold L. Lunger, *The Political Ethics of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis, 1954).
Granville T. Walker, *Preaching in the Thought of Alexander Campbell* (St. Louis, 1954).

⁷ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 54, right column.

⁸ Lindley, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-41, 162.

be chosen by the congregation on the basis of previous qualification. Some of these strictures were later to be modified. But the point was that the Baptists could scarcely relish his sally any more than his jibe that they had de-horned the beast and produced a hornless ox, suitable to maul if not to gore.¹⁰

As for the Presbyterians he picked up a notice in one of the journals which lamented "vacant churches deprived of the means of grace." "Oh, Peter! Oh, Paul!" Campbell ejaculated, "churches vacant!" How could they be vacant so long as they had members, and how could they be deprived of the means of grace so long as the congregation could appoint one of their own number to administer the Sacraments?¹¹ However warranted this jibe, the tone was not precisely irenic.

Nevertheless, the failure of Alexander Campbell's efforts for the re-union of the churches is not to be attributed primarily to his attitude. He riddled and ridiculed, but he was not contentious nor cantankerous. Once he ventured to rib an Episcopal minister by branding the affair of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn as an ugly story. The rector retorted that the Bible contained some ugly stories. Campbell laughed, and arm-in-arm they went in for dinner.¹² Debate and even controversy need not of necessity preclude unity.

Nor again is the work of Alexander for church unity to be written off as vain. Dean Inge once remarked that in religion nothing fails like success, and he might have said that nothing succeeds like failure. A witness is itself of value, and may bear ultimate fruit. Campbell was certainly right in deploring the divisions rampant in his day. He had come from North Ireland where the Presbyterians inherited from Scotland the divisions between the established church and the Seceders. And these in turn were split into the Burghers and the Anti-Burghers. This division was crossed by that of the New Light and the Old Lights to form four parties: New Light Burghers, Old Light Burghers, New Light Anti-Burghers, and Old Light Anti-Burghers. The point between Burghers and Anti-Burghers had reference to an oath required in Scotland but not in Ireland, let alone Kentucky. The father of Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, in 1807 came to the United States as the pastor of a Seceder Presbyterian church and when he dared to minister to all varieties of Presbyterians in the area he was expelled.

⁹ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 233, left column.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239, left column.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹² Robert Richardson, *Memorials of Alexander Campbell II*, p. 64.

Alexander Campbell could not conceive of Christ so divided that there could be a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Roman Catholic conscience. (He did not mention the Congregationalists, who did not flourish in his region.) Besides, said he, there is in Kentucky a Licking Association Baptist conscience and a Particular Baptist conscience.¹³ Under fictitious names he reported the situation in his district in 1825: "*William Pedibus*, the shoemaker, lost the custom of all the Presbyterians in town, because he said that Parson Trim denied free agency. And *Thomas Vulcanus*, the blacksmith, never rode a Methodist's horse since the time he censured Elder Vox's sermon on the possibility of falling from grace."¹⁴

Campbell lived, as W. E. Garrison has well pointed out,¹⁵ when sectarianism had accomplished its work in breaking rigid authoritarianism and tyranny, and had itself become an abuse because of its minute particularism and petty rancor. The time had come to forget and minimize ancient and often outmoded differences and to realize a genuine unity in Christ. If Campbell did found a new denomination, it was a denomination dedicated to Christian unity and has produced a number of noble advocates. A century of exhortation on their part has markedly contributed to the strength of the contemporary ecumenical movement. Another point worthy of note is that Campbell perceived the utter folly of sectarian differences on the mission field,¹⁶ and here it was that the church unity movement had its first inception.

Yet there is no denying that Campbell in his lifetime met with failure. This may be attributed solely to the perversity of the sects, and indeed Campbell said that union required them to "throw away everything that they possess but error and falsehood."¹⁷ But then of course the question would arise as to what is error and what is falsehood. The failure of his scheme, however, I would suggest lay neither in his own belligerence nor in his opponent's stubbornness, but rather in his formulation of the conditions for unity. The core of his program was epitomized in a slogan already popular: "In essentials unity, non-essentials liberty, in both charity." The term "essential" referred to that which is necessary to be believed or done as a condition for salvation, and unity meant that on these points no latitude was

¹³ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 164, right column.

¹⁴ West, *op. cit.*, p. 35, citing the first edition of *The Christian Baptist*, II, 142.

¹⁵ Winifred Ernest Garrison, *The Sources of Alexander Campbell's Theology* (St. Louis, 1900).

¹⁶ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 135, right column. The same point is made in *A Connected View of the Principles and Rules . . . on which all Christians May Form the Communion* (Bethany, Virginia, 1835).

¹⁷ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 164, left column.

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¹⁷ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 164, left column.

permissible. All those admitted to the church must agree and conform as to essentials. On matters not requisite for salvation, which one would not be damned either way, diversity could be allowed, and toward those without as well as toward those within a kindly spirit should be entertained.

This slogan had behind it a long history.¹⁸ St. Augustine long since recognized a distinction between points of greater and less importance and quoted with relish the retort to one who asked what God was doing before he created the world, namely, that He was making hell for those who asked too many questions. On the eve of the Reformation the Brethren of the Common Life employed the idea in order to disparage theological speculation. Their patron saint was the Penitent Thief who was saved with so little theology. He believed only that Christ could get him to Paradise. Erasmus of Rotterdam in this tradition recommended deferring to the judgment day the discussion of thorny and insoluble riddles, such as the distinction between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Ghost or as to how God could be both three and one. That alone, said Erasmus, can be essential for salvation which can be universally understood and the emphasis should be placed on the fruits of the spirit rather than on the tenets of the head. Sebastian Castellio, in the great controversy over the execution of Servetus for heresy, ventured to classify among the non-essentials the belief in the Trinity and predestination, as well as an opinion as to whether Christ was ubiquitous, as Luther held, or seated at the right hand of God the Father. Zwingli and Calvin contended. But the man who gave the idea its most influential formulation was Jacob Acontius in a book entitled *The Wiles of Satan*. He there affirmed that alone to be essential for salvation which is so designated in Scripture and he could discover only two points. "The just shall live by faith." Therefore those who live by works are excluded and this rules out the Catholics. The other text is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." This would exclude the Sabellians and one would have thought also the Socinians, though Acontius did not draw this conclusion. He broke a lance for Anabaptists who adopted a Gnostic attitude as to the flesh of Christ, not on the ground that they were right but that the point was not essential for salvation.

One observes that the principle of unity in essentials and liberty in non-essentials is exclusive as well as inclusive. Only those who

¹⁸ Walter Koehler, "Die Geistesahnen des Acontius," *Festschrift für K. Müller* (Tübingen, 1922), pp. 198-208.

non-essentials. The outworking of the principle is strikingly illustrated in the scheme of Oliver Cromwell, who in line with the idea Acontius, excluded the Catholics and the Unitarians. He included the following order of preference the Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, with the Anglicans and Quakers on the fringe subject to restriction primarily on political grounds because the Anglicans adhered to the crown and the Quakers would not fight against the king.

Alexander Campbell had the same basic plan and he defined the essentials in the same manner. With Acontius he held that the points necessary for salvation can be only those so stipulated in the New Testament. This is our sole source of the knowledge of God. This is it were, the charter of the church. We are "to open the New Testament as if mortal man had never seen it before,"¹⁹ casting aside all preconceived notions, all sophisticated subtleties, all creeds which are merely inferences from the Bible and therefore the inventions of men. When we thus open the Book we shall find two conditions for salvation. Said Campbell: "THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT . . . is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is that is required of Heaven to admission into the church. . . . The fact is expressed in a single proposition—that Jesus the Nazarene the Messiah. . . . The one institution is baptism into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."²⁰ Observe that there is an article of belief. Campbell did not object to a creed, for every article of faith is a creed. Neither did he object to the use of a creed as a test. His objection was to any creed which goes beyond the Bible. In addition to belief he postulated one demand as to practice, namely, baptism.

If Campbell had stopped here he might have had a basis on which a very large degree of union could have been possible. The Universalists would not have been excluded. Campbell considered them mistaken though no worse than those who think that hell holds infants for a span long. Both have "mounted their winged horse and soared beyond the regions of revelation."²¹ He defended the right of a Universalist named Raines to Christian fellowship because he advanced universalism as a private opinion and not as a part of the gospel.

¹⁹ Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. II, 97.

²⁰ *The Christian System* (1840. Reprint Cincinnati, 1901), p. 101.

²¹ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 202, right column.

later renounced his error.²²

The demands above formulated by Campbell would not have excluded the Unitarians. Many of them would have confessed that Jesus was the Messiah. They might have balked at baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, though these terms could have been defined in a New Testament rather than a Nicene sense. Campbell affirmed that he would not reject a man because he was Unitarian, if he would confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God.²³ On the other hand, the Socinians whom he defined as those who call Jesus the son of Joseph, he described not as Christians but as "drivelling philosophers." And we went on to say, "From my heart I pity these Socinians . . . and would not, the Bible be in my hand, rush into the presence of the Judge of the quick and dead with their sentiments for twice the value of the universe."²⁴

The conditions as stipulated above are certainly broad. But the Campbell began by definition and addition to narrow the range. Baptism, said he, meant only adult baptism. In the New Testament he could find no reference to infant baptism, therefore it could not have been practiced and therefore it is not to be observed by us. With one stroke he cut off the possibility of union with all of the churches except the Baptists, unless of course the others were to abandon their own tenets. As for those who did not, said he: "Infants, idiots, deaf and dumb persons, innocent Pagans . . . with all the pious Pedobaptists, we commend to the mercy of God. But such of them wilfully *despise* this salvation, and who, having the opportunity to be immersed for the remission of their sins, wilfully *despise* or refuse we have as little hope for them as they have for all who refuse salvation *on their own terms of the gospel*."²⁵

Next he arrived at the conclusion that the term baptize in the New Testament could mean only immersion. He found no record of sprinkling; therefore there was no sprinkling. And if immersion was the universal mode, then the New Testament verse should be translated "Repent and be immersed."²⁶ Immersion is necessary to salvation because only in this way are we in actual possession of the remission of our sins. The non-immersed may indeed be happy in the peace of God because they are not aware that they are lost, but no

²² Jesse R. Kellems, *Alexander Campbell and his Disciples* (New York, 1930).

²³ Lindley, *op. cit.*, p. 66, citing the Rice-Campbell Debate, pp. 808-11.

²⁴ *The Christian Baptist*, p. 51, left column.

²⁵ *The Christian System*, p. 203.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40, and *The Christian Baptist*, p. 422, left column.

enjoy a rational hope save those immersed for the remission of sins.²⁷ On the other hand, both as to adult baptism and immersion absolute conditions for salvation or even church union there was some wavering. At another time he said, "There is no occasion for making immersion on a profession of faith absolutely essential to a Christian."²⁸ Again he declared that there are Pedobaptist congregations "of whose Christianity I think as highly as of most Baptist congregations, and with whom I could wish to be on the very same terms of Christian communion on which I stand with the whole Baptist society."²⁹

His tendency was, however, to grow more and more restrictive. There were two principles operative in his procedure. One was to return to the simplicity of the New Testament faith and require no more. The other was to restore the practice of the Early Christian community and to suffer no less. A further assumption was that the practice of the New Testament churches must have been uniform. Campbell noted in the book of Acts (XX, 7) the verse which read that at Troas "On the first day of the week when the disciples came together for the breaking of the loaf." The purpose of the assembly then was to celebrate the Lord's Supper. What was done on that first day must have been done on every first day, and what was done at Troas must have been done in every Christian community. And what then constituted the universal practice of the early church is binding, likewise, upon present day Christians.³⁰ Whether Campbell intended to say that the observance of this practice is necessary for salvation is not clear. He did consider it necessary for church membership and presumably also for Christian unity. He may have shifted his definition of essential from that which is essential for salvation to that which is necessary for unity. In any case, he had introduced a further restrictive principle. In fact, he had reached the point where he could not unite with anybody. The insistence on adult baptism cut off all save the Baptists, and weekly communion eliminated them. Campbell had ended up with a new denomination.

What then of church unity? It is not entirely clear that he decided it anymore. He declared quite early, as a matter of fact, in his career, "I have no idea of seeing, nor would wish to see, the sects unite in one grand army. This would be dangerous to our liberties and

²⁷ *The Christian System*, p. 204. Cf. *The Christian Baptist*, p. 401, right column.

²⁸ Lindley, *op. cit.*, p. 60, citing *The Millennial Harbinger* VIII, p. 506.

²⁹ Lindley, *op. cit.*, p. 70, citing *The Christian Baptist*, first edition, III, 238-39.

³⁰ *The Christian System*, p. 275 and *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 165 left column, 14 right column, 195 left column.

laws. For this the Saviour did not pray.”³¹ Is then the ideal that there should be denominations, but that they should cherish each other in a spirit of charity? Organic unity would then be relinquished as an ideal.

He noted the possibility of fellowship at different levels. Already there were Baptists and Pedobaptists who met together at monthly meetings for prayer and praise, yet they were not willing to take communion together. He agreed that baptism must precede communion, and of course baptism administered in the proper way. Still it was an anomaly to be willing to pray and praise in unison and not to come down at the Lord's Table. He seemed unsettled in his own mind whether to remove the disparity by moving forward to the Lord's Table or by going in the other direction to cut off the joint prayer meetings.³²

When now one surveys Campbell's life work it may seem pathetic because he decried the jangling of the sects and yet set up such conditions for Christian unity that none could unite save those who adopted a system different from all the rest. It is easy enough to pick flaws and discover inconsistencies in his scheme. His assumption that New Testament practice was uniform is entirely untenable. Incidentally, if it were, one wonders why on his own premises he did not go on to daily communion, because we read in the book of Acts that “the disciples continued daily in breaking bread” (2:46). Campbell got around this by making a distinction between the Lord's Supper and the love feast.³³ But for this separation there is no warrant prior to the second century. In any case, the entire effort to discover a uniform pattern in early Christian practice has been proved untenable by modern historical research.

Consequently, we cannot go back to Alexander Campbell for a specific scheme of church unity, but we can learn from him. His presuppositions were sound. Christian unity will not be Christian unless grounded on a common basis of fundamental affirmations and these must be derived from New Testament Christianity. His mistake was the assumption of his day that the New Testament was rigid and uniform. Our discovery of flexibility in the period of the beginning opens for us a wider door of latitude.

We can learn from Campbell also his willingness to learn. He changed a great deal during his lifetime. He confessed that once

³¹ *The Christian Baptist for 1824* in the edition of 1856, p. 140.

³² *The Christian Baptist*, p. 238.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 288 right column to 289 left column.

d been like the Indian's tree, so straight that it leaned a little the other way.³⁴ His opposition to missionary societies and to a trained ministry was abandoned after he became the leader of a new denomination. In fact, his whole program suffered change. One writer has suggested that until 1830 his effort was to unite the churches, that from 1830 'til his death the plan was to draw the receptive out of the reformed churches. A third stage came after his death when the disciples became a denomination and took their place as colleagues with mutual respect for the others.³⁵ That stage may not have been reached by Alexander Campbell, but he was on the way. He was never static. His very progress, of course, may be regarded as an abandonment of his ideal of unity. And yet that was not the case. He never ceased to lament sectarianism. Just what better scheme we can devise to overcome it, is for us to work out. We are indebted to him for a persistent harping on the scandal, not only of division, but of acrimony.

The greatest thing about the man was his spirit. Commenting on his debate with the Presbyterians, he said, "I have no object but truth, and whatever may be published against my pamphlet, in a Christian and candid manner, shall receive every attention. But let them not lose their temper, nor substitute railing for argument. . . . If any are convinced, let them beware of stifling convictions. . . . Though I am decidedly convinced of the complete independency of apostolical churches, and of the duty of following them, I would not be understood as placing undue importance upon this point. Christians of every denomination I love; and I will never, I hope, withhold my hand, or my countenance from any who, after impartial investigation, conscientiously differ from me. I can from my heart say, 'Grace with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth.'"³⁶

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 238, left column.

³⁵ Kellems, *op. cit.*, first chapter. Cf. Oliver Reed Whitley, "The Sect-to-Denomination Process in an American Religious Movement: The Disciples of Christ," *The Northwestern Social Science Quarterly* (Dec., 1955), pp. 276-81.

³⁶ *The Christian Baptist*, pp. 75 right column to 76 left column.



A PLAN FOR A UNITED CHURCH
in the United States

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FOREWORD

This issue of the *Ecumenical Studies Series* is devoted to the Plan of Union with the express purpose of fostering serious and responsible study of the Plan in its present draft form.

Groups of Disciple ministers, seminary students or concerned laymen who are willing to give the Plan the kind of attention it deserves are invited to study the following materials carefully, to note suggestions and comments for possible changes in the Plan, and to forward these to the Council on Christian Unity where they will be collated and transmitted to the Executive Committee of the Greenwich Conference.

Background materials concerning the Plan, its history, status and implications are given in detail in the following pages. Working groups may find the questions listed on pages 16 and 17 of particular help in discussing the Plan in general after consideration of the specific proposals involved.

As a people who believe in the oneness of the church, and as one of the eight participating communions in drafting a plan for union, we are concerned that these proposals have the best kind of consideration we can give them.

ROBERT TOBIAS
Associate Executive Secretary
Council on Christian Unity

INTRODUCTION TO GREENWICH PLAN OF UNION

By

BISHOP IVAN LEE HOLT

Chairman, Conference on Church Union

THE Greenwich Plan of Church Union has grown out of many meetings and much study. In the long road to union this plan is the first blue print of a United Church, including churches of different polities and traditions.

We have had a score of church unions in the United States in the past fifty years, but this is the first time that a union plan has been worked out which sets forth a recognition in one church of the Congregational, Episcopal and Presbyterian forms of church government. The men who prepared the plan are official representatives of their communions. In the midst of our discussions there developed a proposal for union of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. and the Presbyterian Church U. S. So those two denominations withdrew from discussions of a larger union. It is my earnest hope that they will return to participate in further discussions.

Now two other churches in the original group are consummating a union, the Congregational-Christian Churches and the Evangelical & Reformed Church. I rejoice in this union, and I do not believe it will decrease in any way interest in a larger union.

I am deeply grateful for the concern of the Disciples' Church. Their representatives are so deeply conscious of a desire for a larger church that they have given the most intensive study to the Greenwich Plan. May God lead us all into a greater and inclusive Protestant Church in the United States. This Plan may not be the final form that union will take, but it merits the most intensive study, and will remain for a good many years the most significant step toward union ever undertaken by American Protestantism.

The American section of the World Council of Churches will convene at Oberlin in September a conference on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek." That could advance the cause of union, and yet it may delay any concrete proposals, for no plan for church union will emerge there. It may suggest a deeper and wider union than any yet proposed, and leave the way clear for those of us who would seek

Protestantism is Ready Now to Become One Church*

By

CHARLES CLAYTON MORRISON

"Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas . . . all are yours."

I Corinthians 3:22

THE ecumenical movement for the unity of Christendom operates in three zones: (1) on a world scale, concerning itself with all Christian churches throughout the world; (2) in a middle zone, concerned with the churches of continental Europe and the West; and (3) in Western Protestantism, concerning itself with the denominational churches of the United States and Canada, including their younger churches in foreign lands. The problem of achieving Christian unity is, in essence, the same in all these zones, but different in the degree of their nearness to or remoteness from the goal. On the world scale the difficulties are greater. In the middle zone they are substantial but less. In continental America such progress has already been made that the goal of One church can actually be envisioned.

Here the churches not only participate in the world-wide ecumenical movement, but have developed an ecumenical movement of their own. During the past fifty years, the sharp edges of sectarian claims and feelings have been worn down by the experience of many forms of cooperative association, including national and community federations. In these associations they have discovered that the evangelical faith which we all share in equal measure transcends all our differences and dwarfs them into irrelevancy. Thus the way would seem to be open for Protestantism in this zone to become One church.

THE GREENWICH PLAN

Already some sixteen mergers of denominations, by twos or threes, have been achieved and other such unions are contemplated. One of these represents the rapprochement of eight or nine denominations under the so-called Greenwich Plan for their organic union. This plan presupposes that Protestantism has now reached the stage in the development of its own inner or spiritual unity where a united church can be realistically projected. In my own words, I would interpret this presupposition as follows: *The treasures of all our evangelical*

* An address delivered to a nation-wide study commission of Disciples of Christ and reprinted from *The Pulpit* by permission of the editor.

churches—their doctrines, their polities, their fellowships, their very habits of doing things—can be taken up and embraced in One church without compromise of conscience or the restriction of Christian freedom. This faith is ultimately derived from Christ the Head of the Church. But, happily, its realism is confirmed by the concrete evidence of a firm trend in Protestantism in the direction of its realization.

The present stage in this movement has been reached and illuminated by a progressive series of changes in the spirit and practice of the denominations over the past two or three generations. These changes point distinctly, I shall affirm, in the direction of a united church. Whether Protestantism is ready to become One church is a question that is being answered for us by the denominations themselves. They have reached the point where their separation can no longer be reasonably defended.

A FIRM TREND TOWARD UNION

It is important that the ecumenical movement in this particular zone shall take account of the actual present state of mind of the denominations. Where this is not done, the discussion tends to wander off into bypaths of irrelevancy or into depths of theological or ecclesiological theory which cloud the real issue and obstruct the open road. I shall name and discuss seven of these ecumenical commitments of the denominations. Taken cumulatively, they call imperatively for a definitive commitment to a united church.

1. *We are all agreed that the members of all our churches are Christians, equally accepted by Christ as members of His church.* There was a time when we could not assume a unanimous and hearty approval of this affirmation. It was not openly denied, but it was often ambiguously affirmed with qualifications and reservations. That ingenious theological device called "the uncovenanted mercies of God" was brought into play to cover the embarrassment of those whose sectarian conscience inhibited a hearty acknowledgment that members of other churches stood before God on an equality with those of their own "true faith." Happily that spirit is with us no longer.

2. *All our denominations are by intention, conviction and in fact equally Christian churches.* Not one will claim to be more Christian than others. It is still somewhat difficult for some to make this affirmation, but it is impossible for them not to make it. It used to be hard for Baptists to affirm it and for Episcopalians and for Disciples of Christ. We squirmed and talked about the "invisible church."

of the church, and about immersion-baptism and about the freedom of the local congregation from "ecclesiasticism." But we have changed. And when the ghost of these dead controversies appears and tells us that by making this acknowledgment we would deny the faith of our fathers, we are not scared. We can no longer pray the pharisee's prayer, but like the publican, we present ourselves and our denomination before God in a spirit of humility. A larger faith, a sensitivity to the values possessed by other churches and a more Christian humility have taken hold of our hearts and driven out the evil spirit of sectarian pride.

3. *All our denominations share equally in the sin of maintaining schismatic churches.* It is a truism of the Christian faith that schism is sin. Who did sin—the fathers of your denomination or the church from which they broke away? We cannot and need not know. It may have been the dissidents, or it may have been the church which they renounced, or the wrong may have been on both sides. But there is always sin in schism. "You are carnal," says Paul, when you divide Christ's body. Schism is not the kind of sin that is covered by the Ten Commandments, or by any social standard. The secular mind does not understand why schism is sin. Schism in the Body of Christ is a Christian sin. For the Christian conscience to be comfortable in it betrays an insensitivity to the nature of our holy faith and of the church which enshrines it. All our denominations, yours and mine, are caught in this indisputable equality in the sin of schism. As Archbishop Temple said, "So long as any of us are in schism, all are in schism."

WHERE IS THE SIN

Where is the locus of this sin? Is it in our theological differences or our different modes of worship or our different forms of church order? No. There is no sin in these diversities. Indeed, there is virtue in them, and they can enrich the fellowship of a united church. Our sin lies in our maintaining separate man-made *churches* based upon them. How may we hope by God's grace to be absolved of this sin? There is only one way: *We must cease being churches.* We must trustfully offer to the fellowship of the whole church what we call our "distinctive witness" to the Christian faith. This is Christian unity. This spells a united church.

4. *Our way of thinking about the Christian faith has undergone profound changes in the past half-century.* It is necessary now to look at our denominational differences in terms of their actual contempo-

rary reality, not merely in terms of their historical origin. Yet when we are asked to state what our denomination "stands for," do we not turn to the history books where we find only what a long time ago "stood for"? The fallacy here is obvious. The ecumenical movement is not concerned to unite the churches of a century ago; it is concerned to unite the living churches of today. These churches have all passed through an era of profound change in theological thinking and in their evaluation of the very issues out of which our denomination arose. So true is this that if any one of our evangelical denominations was not now in existence, few if any of its members would feel any urge of conscience to start it or to restore it.

GREAT CHANGES IN OUR THINKING

If this fact were seriously taken into account by the ecumenical movement it would save endless discussion of matters that are irrelevant to the concrete problem of a united church. I do not agree with that shallow view of Christian unity which scorns theology and theological discussion, and insists that it should have no place in the united church. On the contrary, my view is that a united church is the true place for the consideration of the great themes to which theology is devoted. We will always have a sectarian theology as long as we have sectarian churches. An ecumenical theology is one of the most urgent desiderata of the Christian faith. But we can achieve an ecumenical theology only within an ecumenical church.

No doubt, the conversations in the world-wide zone of ecumenical operation require long and patient consideration of theological and other ideological subjects. Conversation between the churches of East and West is clouded with mutually unfamiliar ideologies. A common universe of discourse has to be attained before there can be much talk about unity. But the denominations of Protestantism already enjoy a common ideology. Long isolated within narrow denominational walls, their main conversation with one another in the past was in the form of debate. But their mentality has now been liberated into the open spaces of common evangelical Christianity, and debating has ceased because there is so little between them that is vital enough to argue about.

5. *The doctrinal differences which formerly existed between the denominations are now embraced in the denominations themselves.* In this degree our denominations are themselves becoming ecumenical! If a denomination can embrace a considerable variety of differ-

interpretations of modern thought on things both old and new, is it not about ready to go into a united church? My answer is that it would be more at home in the united church than to continue living with itself! This is because a denomination that has become ecumenical minded still retains its sectarian creed or confession of faith. Whether this is explicitly formulated or stereotyped in an ideology, it operates in the same manner. Thus the ecumenical spirit of such a denomination must live in constant insecurity lest a factious element seize upon its long quiescent sectarian creed and in its name divide the church. But the united church would openly embrace these various confessions of faith without standardizing any formulation or stereotype. Thus the major cause of schism would be removed.

PASSING OF THE HERETIC

An instructive fact to be noted in this connection is the virtual passing of the heretic. Since the days of those famous "heretics," Swing and Briggs and McGiffert and Foster and Gilbert and Thomas, to name no others—the legal apparatus of ecclesiastical sectarianism had become rusted with disuse. But it was recently called into play in the state of Wisconsin to convict as heretics three young ministers of devout evangelical faith who deviated from the wording of a confession of faith formulated more than 400 years ago. I cannot believe that the whole United Lutheran Church, except these three young ministers, has been impervious to the light which modern evangelical thought has thrown upon the issues for which these men were convicted of heresy. But this is not my point. What I want to say is that if the Lutheran tradition were embraced in a united church, its supporters would be freed from the legal necessity of resorting to an inhumane, self-righteous and grossly un-Christian method of maintaining its sectarian integrity. They would find themselves in a context for dealing with such "deviations" in a humane and Christian manner.

The momentary situation in Congregationalism presents a pathetic but ludicrous absurdity. Instead of a denomination pronouncing a verdict of heresy upon some individual, a factional minority pronounces the whole denomination heretical! The Congregational denomination has been second to none in its more than a half century of unanimous commitment to the cause of Christian unity. A score of years ago, it actually united with another denomination. Its own inner unity was maintained throughout the Fundamentalist storm of the 1920s, with no appreciable loss or disturbance. But now the un-

expected has happened. Congregationalism has produced a Fundamentalism of its own! A minority group takes for itself the title "Association for the Preservation of Congregational Principles." It charges the whole denomination with apostasy and would forbid 75 per cent of the local churches to exercise their congregational freedom by uniting with another denomination. This is the ultimate irony of denominationalism. It re-enacts a procedure that stains the whole history of this unholy system.

But these two instances do not nullify the fact that the differences between our denominations are now largely embraced by the denominations themselves. Rather, they illuminate it (1) by the humiliation with which these anachronistic procedures are regarded by the main body of opinion in the two denominations concerned, and (2) by the demonstration that so long as the denominations exist as *churches*, these shameful disloyalties to Christ are bound to recur.

THE GREAT DELUSION

6. *Our denominations are now beginning to see that their differences, such as they are, can be more hopefully reconciled within a united church than in sectarian isolation.* The great delusion that has obsessed our denominations is that a separate *church* is necessary in order to bear witness to some Christian truth which is held distinctively. By "bearing witness" is meant persuading the general church to accept it. This delusion has always been cherished by all our denominations. Should we not now be able to learn from our history how false it is? What denomination has contributed its "distinctive truth" to the whole church by this means? Has Presbyterianism? Has Lutheranism? I know of no more tragic illustration of this fallacy than the long and stubborn separation of the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Vital differences they seemed to be four centuries ago. But because these two branches of the Reformation were isolated from each other behind the walls of separate ecclesiastical churches, they have not been able to see that the truth of one is not opposed but complementary to the truth of the other.

Have the Congregationalists made an impression upon the rest of the church by their sectarian illustration of the autonomy of its local churches? Have the Disciples and the Baptists made an impression upon Methodists and Episcopalians by bearing a sectarian witness to immersion-baptism? Have the Episcopalians made any impression at all upon the other churches of the Reformation by holding their historic episcopate in sectarian exclusiveness? Away with this shabby

rationalization! To build a sectarian wall around a Christian truth does not "bear witness" to it—it takes that truth out of circulation. Prejudices are raised against the adoption of any Christian treasure offered with a sectarian patent on it.

7. *The association of our denominations in national and community federations has led them into a mode of cooperation which is in principle, organic.* When the practice of "comity" was first proposed for application to the foreign and home mission fields, some denominations sensed a "danger" in it and refused to participate. However, it was innocent enough. It practically meant nothing more than an agreement to stay out of one another's territory. This was nearly fifty years ago. Today, however, the problem of Protestantism in American cities has become acute by the decimation of what is called the "inner city" and the mushroom growth of suburbia. The federated denominations sense the scandal that would ensue upon the mad rush of sectarian self-interest into these lush fields. Operating not by a self-denying contractual agreement among themselves to stay out of a community first entered by one of them, they commit the whole of unchurched suburbia to their federation, to allocate specific communities to specific denominations and aid the development of their churches therein.

If we take a good look at this procedure, we cannot miss the organic principle of united action by the denominations in establishing one another's churches! So long as comity meant only a negative self-restraint, it was, as I have ironically said, "innocent" enough. But this blessed innocence has now grown into a conscious organic ecclesiastical unity *at this one point*. If the denominations can cooperate in establishing one another's churches, what becomes of their special "witness" by which they have immemorially justified their sectarian separateness? Their special witness is manifestly either held with indifference or its possession by the general church is acknowledged.

Other instances in this category could be added. I will refer to one more, namely, the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago. Four denominational seminaries have created an organic union of their faculties to study and teach theology and train candidates for the Christian ministry. These seminaries represent Baptist, Congregational, Unitarian and Disciples denominations. Their united faculty is presided over by a Lutheran dean. It includes Episcopal, Presbyterian, Reformed, Quaker and Lutheran professors in addition to those representing the four federated denominations. The primary

inspiration of this unique development is the ecumenical spirit. What it means as an illustration of the new mind in Protestantism your imagination will make it unnecessary for me to elaborate.

AT THE POINT OF DECISION

The changes that have taken place in our denominations have brought us a long way on the road to unity. We now stand at the place where decision must be made. The spirit of Christ who has opened our eyes to the evil of our divisions and ameliorated our differences to the point of their relative indifference, will not let us stand gazing idly into space. The American branch of the World Council of Churches is organizing a church-wide study of the theme, "What Kind of Unity Do We Seek?" I offer the foregoing evidence as marking a distinct progression, both logical and historical, toward one and no alternative goal. We may hope that this American study will not bog down in theological or ecclesiological theory which no doubt is relevant in other zones of the ecumenical movement but irrelevant in the scene of American Protestantism. *We are ready to become one church.* Protestantism is in quest of a church that both transcends the outworn denominational system and embraces all its treasures in one body.

The unity we seek stands in contrast to the idea of a "monolithic" church, a conception which is often imputed to the advocates of church union. I do not know of any representative Protestant churchman who conceives of the united church as consisting all of one piece. Such a church, if it could be achieved, would be quickly broken by internal pressure into many pieces. We seek no such unity. Rather, our goal is an inclusive church, rich in the variety of its thought and practice and its sensitive concern for the freedom of its members under Christ. In a word, a church in which variety is a virtue no less than unity.

Our churches have come a long way in our sectarian wanderings. But the road we have taken in the past half century has brought us together in sight of the shining tableland which is our goal. An upward path stretches clearly before us. And the light that streams upon it is reflected from the face of Christ who stands with outstretched arms. Let us go up together!

A PLAN
FOR A UNITED CHURCH
in the
UNITED STATES

Proposed for Study by the
Greenwich Conference on Church Union

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THE MEMBERS OF THE FIRST GREENWICH CONFERENCE
SEABURY HOUSE, GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT,
DECEMBER 14 - 16, 1949

(These are all official delegates, elected by their denominations).

Congregational Christian . . . John C. Bennett, F. Q. Blanchard, Douglas Horton, James H. Lightbourne, Frederick M. Meek, Russell Henry Stafford.

Disciples of Christ . . . George W. Buckner, Jr., Gaines M. Cook, A. Dal Fiers, R. B. Montgomery, Charles Clayton Morrison, Roy G. Ross.

Evangelical and Reformed . . . John C. Gieser, G. W. Grauer, John Lentz John W. Mueller, George W. Richards.

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Colored Methodist Episcopal . . . C. C. Neal.

Methodist . . . Bishop Ivan Lee Holt, *Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, Rufus C. Baker, Nolan B. Harmon, C. C. Parlin, John M. Versteeg.

National Council of Community Churches . . . J. R. Howe, R. C. Stoll.

Presbyterian U.S.A. . . . (Ralph Waldo Lloyd, William B. Pugh, Joseph A. Vance.

OBSERVERS:

Church of the Brethren . . . Raymond R. Peters.

Church of God (Headquarters—Cleveland, Tennessee) . . . U. P. Bronson.

Protestant Episcopal . . . T. O. Wedel.

Evangelical United Brethren . . . Bishop J. Balmer Showers.

Five Years Meeting of Friends . . . W. Glenn Roberts.

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Home Missions Council of North America . . . I. George Nace, Stanley U. North.

International Council of Religious Education . . . Arlo Ayres Brown.

Secretary . . . Mark A. Dawber.

* (Bishop Oxnam of the Methodist Church was unable to be present)

CONFIDENTIAL..
For study and comment only

Revised Draft of 22 May 1953



PLAN OF UNION FOR A UNITED CHURCH

TO THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, whose body the Church is:

Introduction

THE following Plan of Church Union received its initial inspiration at the biennial meeting of the Congregational Christian Council held at Grinnell, Iowa, in June, 1946. A resolution was there unanimously adopted requesting the Federal Council of Churches to invite those denominations which "recognize one another's ministries and sacraments" to send officially appointed representatives to a plenary conference to explore the possibility of a closer union. This proposal was recorded in the following August by the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ, which somewhat broadened the invitation to include "those communions which are in sufficient accord in essentials of Christian faith and order to give promise that such a conference would result in further and effectual achievement of Christian unity."

Whereupon, the invitation was formally transmitted to each of the 14 constituent denominations of the Federal Council, and others not affiliated with it. Nine denominations responded favorably as follows: Methodist, Presbyterian USA, Presbyterian US, Congregational Christian, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical and Reformed, African Methodist Episcopal, Colored Methodist Episcopal, and the Association of Community Churches. These bodies represent about 16 million members, or nearly 40 per cent of American Protestantism.

Their appointed representatives met at Greenwich, Connecticut, in December, 1949. During three days of deliberation it was unanimously decided that they should seek for nothing less than "an organic union" of their several bodies, "a fellowship and organization of the church which will enable it to act as one body under Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church." The conference organized itself as a continuing body, to be called, simply, "The Conference on Church Union." Bishop Ivan Lee Holt of the Methodist Church was elected president; Rev. Dr. William B. Pugh, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA, vice-president; Rev. Dr. John Lentz, of the Evangelical Reformed Church, treasurer. Rev. Dr. Douglas Horton, minister

of the Congregational Christian General Council, accepted the task of acting secretary. A Drafting Committee was appointed to draw up Plan of Union. Two members from each participating denomination were named to constitute such a committee, together with members of the Executive Committee, as ex-officio.

The first meeting of the Drafting Committee was held at Randolph New Hampshire, in July, 1950. During four days of intensive deliberations, a Plan of Union was drawn up which received the approval of the entire committee. Rev. Dr. Pugh contributed largely to the drafting of the Plan. His tragic death two months later removed from the undertaking one of its wisest and most ardent advocates. A second meeting of the Drafting Committee reviewed the Plan and presented it to a plenary session of the Conference on Church Union in New York, in October, 1950, where, with minor changes, it was approved for advisory submission to a joint convocation of the Conference on Church Union and the several commissions on inter-church relations of the nine denominations.

This convocation, consisting of 75 representatives of the nine denominations, was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in January, 1951. The Plan was thoroughly discussed. No formal action was taken or requested, though the sentiment was strongly favorable and hopeful. Three denominational groups — Methodist, Congregational and Disciples of Christ — met separately and presented to the convocation memoranda containing assurances of hearty approval of the Plan, together with certain suggestions for its improvement. Rev. Dr. Gaines M. Cook, Executive Secretary of the International Convention of Disciples of Christ, was elected secretary of the Conference on Church Union. Since his resignation Rev. Kenneth Path, of the Community Churches, is secretary.

A meeting of the Drafting Committee was held in New York in March, 1951, at which all the suggestions for amendment proposed at Cincinnati were earnestly considered. Some of these were incorporated in the Plan, others were included with modifications, still others were felt to be either unnecessary or inconsistent with the Plan. A further meeting of the Drafting Committee was held in New York in November, 1952. After intensive consideration of the text of the Plan of Union resulting in numerous minor revisions, it was deemed ready to submit to a plenary session of the Conference on Church Union. This session was held at Greenwich in May, 1953. Two days were devoted to a critical examination and interpretation of the Plan and discussion of methods for securing similar consideration from a widely representative cross-section of the churches. For this purpose the Plan is now submitted to the commissions on Christian Unity of the several churches and other church organizations and groups, including theological seminaries, for study and recommendation.

THE APPROACH

In considering the Plan of Union it is important that it be taken, not as a final, comprehensive or adequate plan, but as a kind of line drawing of a possible united church. The fundamental problem which it seeks to solve is that of bringing into one body three types of churches which already recognize one another's ministries and sacraments but are accustomed to operate under somewhat different forms of organization. These forms are usually designated as congregational, episcopal and presbyterian. Previous plans for union have largely attempted to merge these polities by compromising or eliminating their differences. The distinctive characteristic of the present plan is that the essential features of these polities are preserved and maintained simultaneously within the one church.

In our many conferences together we have reached the heartening conclusion that, in their functioning, quite aside from traditional theory, these three types of organization are more similar than is commonly assumed. The congregational group of churches is more like the non-congregational, the episcopal more like the non-episcopal and the presbyterian more like the non-presbyterian groups than any of them has supposed the others to be. The recognition of this fact has made it possible to bring the three types of organization together in a Plan of Union which provides for the continuance of all three.

This Plan is offered to the churches, not with the expectation that they will at once commit themselves to union under it, but in the hope that they may be able to adopt it "in principle" with whatever recommendations they may suggest for its improvement and completion. It is conceived as a minimum structure upon which, if its essential principles are favorably received, further action may be undertaken to consummate the union here envisaged.

Questions will, no doubt, arise concerning matters of procedure within the framework of this Plan. Many such questions have arisen in our deliberations, but they have been put aside in the interest of presenting as simply as possible an over-all picture of what a united church might be. We ask that the Plan be given careful study and that both official and informal groups will crystallize their opinions as to (1) the desirability and (2) the practicability of union on the principles embodied in the Plan. Such expressions of opinion will guide the Conference on Church Union in its further deliberations.

I.

THE DIVINE IMPERATIVE

We, the Conference on Church Union, consisting of officially appointed representatives of our several Churches, gratefully recognize the initiative and guidance of God in the movement among Christian

people for a united Church. The call for unity is a divine imperative and we believe that union is an indispensable means to that end.

We have long known that in essentials of faith we are already one. We now rejoice in the growing realization that the practical operations of our several polities are strikingly similar. Over many years there has been a steady growth of fraternal fellowship, mutual cooperation, and the spirit of unity among us. This has prompted us earnestly and prayerfully to inquire what may be the next step in the development of our responsibility for one another. Through our common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we are made one body in him and, in penitence for our present unhappy separation from one another, we believe that our Master now calls us to transcend those barriers which divide us into various and often competing denominations and churches.

Today, Christians confront a world situation which demands that the churches shall make common cause. In our own and many other sections of the world, secularism, atheism, and religious indifference are strongly entrenched and militant. These evil forces stand sharply over against the Christian Church with its eternal gospel of redemption. They cannot be effectively resisted and overcome by separate churches, but only by the corporate witness and the concerted action of Christians united. In the broad perspective of the world scene, and in view of our great common convictions and concerns, our denominational differences appear relatively inconsequential.

In our meetings together, in prayer and prolonged deliberations, we have reached a common conviction that the time has now come when all the churches must take with profound seriousness both the divine mandate and the practical need for a united Church. Even though this union of Churches may mean some adjustment of denominational traditions and emphases, yet all will be enriched by the varying practices brought into the union. If at any point we must decrease that the Cause of Christ may increase, we shall count our loss as gain.

We look forward in faith and hope to a more comprehensive union than that envisaged by our present undertaking. Holding this faith and this larger hope, but not waiting for its full realization, we are convinced that we should now form ourselves into an organic union; and that our union must be so truly ecumenical in spirit and structure that it may be not only a Church united in itself but so manifestly inspired with a fervent desire and intention to be used of God that it will bring about a more comprehensive union. To this end, we offer a statement of the ecumenical evangelical faith to which such a united Church should bear witness, and propose a Plan of Union.

II.

THE COMMON FAITH

WE ARE ONE in common faith of the Christian Church and in our desire to share as a common heritage the various historic and treasured expressions of that faith.

WE ARE ONE in our common belief

in God our Father;

in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Savior;

in the Holy Spirit, our Guide and Comforter;

in the Holy Catholic Church, through which God's eternal purpose of salvation is proclaimed and his Kingdom comes on earth;

in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as disclosing the Word of God for men, from which new light is evermore breaking forth for us and for our world;

in the forgiveness of sins;

and in the life everlasting.

WE ARE ONE in our faith that the Church is of God and in the deepening sense of obligation with which we hear the prayer of our Lord for his disciples, "That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

WE ARE ONE in that spirit of love which, owning the same Lord, recognizes diversity of gifts, concerns, and ministrations, and assures to all freedom in ways of worship, and of witness.

WE ARE ONE in our purpose that this United Church of Christ be dedicated to our Lord for the furtherance of his redemptive work in the world.

THE PLAN OF UNION

A COVENANT OF UNION

We the Churches hereto assenting, believing that we are acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeking union in Christ with that Christian liberty of conscience and organization, which we now enjoy do hereby unite for the furtherance of the redemptive work of Christ in the world in a visible body to be known as The United Church of Christ. The Churches hereto assenting do mutually covenant and agree upon the following Plan of Union.

I.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. *Organization.*

The Universal Church is the fellowship which God creates by his Holy Spirit through those who experience his grace in Jesus Christ. The local church is the ecumenical Church manifested in a particular place. The United Church of Christ recognizes and respects the freedom of each local church in the discharge of its local responsibilities, and it also provides for an orderly exercise of the mutual responsibilities of the local churches in relation to their sister churches in The United Church. The local church brings into The United Church of Christ, without essential change, all the present structure and procedure.

The form of local church organization naturally varies in some respects with the needs of the particular church and its community. But there exist in the churches of each of the participating denominations a board of officers responsible for fostering and guiding the spiritual life and the general welfare of the congregation, and a board of trustees who are responsible for the church property. The essential inner structure of the local church is preserved in The United Church of Christ.

2. *Union in the Local Community.*

The United Church of Christ is deeply concerned about communities where there are too many churches and others where there are too few and knows that either situation results from the failure of Protestant churches to face together their task and carry on their work in a spirit of cooperation. This means loss in human and spiritual resources.

Without the pressure that overrides local freedom, The United Church of Christ constantly holds before its constituency the ideal of such unity and relocation of churches in rural and urban areas as will enable every church member with his contribution of interest and time and money, to serve his Master and his community most fully.

The United Church of Christ responds to calls from the countryside and from centers of population for aid in carrying out this idea with plans and suggestions for definite local needs.

3. *Classification.*

The United Church of Christ, being catholic and inclusive in purpose and form, embraces the three historic polities of Protestantism: congregational, episcopal, and presbyterian. At the time of organization of The United Church of Christ each denomination in its own way shall declare to which of the three categories its local churches shall be regarded as belonging. Local churches subsequently may change from one classification to another but only after announcement two years in advance.

4. *Worship and the Sacraments.*

Each local church determines its mode of worship and of administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

5. *Admission to Membership.*

In accordance with the practice of all the churches participating in The United Church of Christ, new members are received on profession of faith in Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior. Letters of transfer from other local churches are honored in accordance with the practice of the receiving local church, though we look forward to the time when all letters of transfer will be freely received.

6. *Property.*

In the case of a local church which holds title to its own property, the church retains the title. In the case of a local church where the property is held in trust, the trust may be transferred to The United Church of Christ.

II.

THE MINISTRY

1. *Ordination.*

Ordination in The United Church of Christ is ordination to the ministry of the Church Universal. The act of ordination is performed by the Presbytery on the recommendation of the local church of which the candidate is a member and of the proper examining committee of the Presbytery. The bishop participates in the laying on of hands and ordinarily presides at the service of ordination.

2. *Classification.*

At the time of organization of The United Church of Christ each denomination in its own way shall declare to which of the three categories, congregational, episcopal or presbyterian, its ministers shall be regarded as belonging. Ministers subsequently may change from one category to another at their own request with the approval of the bishop, but only after announcement two years in advance.

3. *Standing of the Ministry.*

The minister shall be a member of the Presbytery where he serves, which shall hold his standing and be responsible for the passing of his character.

4. *Placement of Ministers.*

Ministers are called by or assigned to local churches in their own category, according to the method appropriate to that category.

5. *Installations.*

Installation or recognition of a minister assuming a pastoral relation to a local church is by the Presbytery at the request and with the participation of the church.

6. *The Episcopate.*

The bishop is the spiritual counsellor and guide of the churches and ministers in the Conference in which he is the administrative superin-

tendent. His relation to the churches and ministers of the congregational category is that of an advisor. His relation to the churches and ministers of the presbyterian category is comparable to that of an executive of a Presbytery and Synod. His relation to the churches and ministers of the episcopal category is that of a bishop in historic American Methodism.

The bishop is elected by the General Council on nomination made by the Conference to which his first assignment will be made. He is consecrated by the General Council for life. Each bishop shall be appointed for a term of four years, and shall be eligible for reappointment to the same Conference, or for transfer to another Conference, with the consent of that Conference, so long as the General Council deems it expedient to continue him in office, or until he reaches the established age of retirement.

He is set apart for this office by the imposition of hands of at least one other bishop and at least three ministers of The United Church of Christ. This rite of consecration may be conducted either in the meeting of the Conference or of the General Council. In order to recognize that the responsibility of the bishop pertains to the church-at-large, the authorization of his consecration is by the General Council. A representative of the General Council normally takes part in the laying on of hands.

III.

THE PRESBYTERY

1. *Nature of the Presbytery.*

The Church of Christ manifests itself in many separate congregations, and these need and desire the fellowship of mutual counsel and cooperation. Accordingly, contiguously located churches constitute a natural unit of organization. This is recognized in some form, more or less explicitly, under various names, by all the denominations participating in The United Church of Christ.

To provide for the mutual concern and responsibility of contiguous local churches in The United Church of Christ if they be not fewer than ten in number, a Presbytery may be constituted. It consists of all ministers, not fewer than ten in number, and one lay member from each church within its district. The boundaries of each Presbytery are determined by the churches and Presbyteries concerned, with the advice and approval of the Conference.

2. *Voting.*

Decisions of a Presbytery are normally by majority vote, but if called for by the delegation from any local church of the Presbytery, votes may be taken by classification, congregational, episcopal and presbyterian; a majority vote in each classification to apply to the churches of that classification (and no other classification), within the boundaries of the Presbytery.

3. *Meetings.*

The Presbytery meets at least annually and also when specially called at the request of at least five members. It elects its own officers.

4. *Functions.*

The Presbytery is responsible for (a) recruiting, preparing, and ordaining ministers; (b) the oversight and aid of its ministers and churches; (c) the standing and the passing of the character of its ministers; (d) the election of delegates to the Conference and to the General Council; (e) setting in order and promoting those things that pertain to the spiritual welfare and cooperative work of its constituent churches; (f) cooperation in establishing and dissolving pastoral relations between ministers and churches.

IV.

THE CONFERENCE

1. *Nature of the Conference.*

The Conference embraces a group of contiguous Presbyteries not fewer than three in number. It is the expression in a larger territorial area of the fellowship already manifest in the Presbytery. It expresses mutuality of interest, unity of life, and cooperation. The Conference in The United Church of Christ is comparable to the state convention, state association, synod, diocese, or annual conference of the several denominations.

2. *How Constituted.*

The Conference is composed (a) of equal delegations of ministers and laymen elected by the Presbyteries on the basis of a ratio determined by the Conference itself and its Presbyteries; or, (b) at its option, with the consent of a majority of its Presbyteries, of all the ministers and one lay member from each local church within the Conference. In either case the number of members of the Conference of congregational, episcopal, and presbyterian classifications shall be in ratio to the number of churches of like classification within the Conference boundaries.

3. *Voting.*

Decisions of a Conference are normally by majority vote, but if called for by the delegation from any Presbytery of the Conference, votes may be taken by classification, congregational, episcopal, and presbyterian, a majority vote in each classification to apply to the churches of that classification (and no other classification), within the bounds of the Conference.

4. *Meetings.*

The Conference convenes at least once a year. Each session elects its presiding officer, who may be either a minister or lay member, to be known as Moderator, to serve during that session of the Conference, and who is not eligible for re-election.

5. *Election of Bishops.*

Each Conference has a bishop nominated or approved by the Conference, though not necessarily from its own membership. The bishop is ex-officio a member of the Conference, with the right to vote.

6. *Functions of the Conference.*

The Conference is responsible within its boundaries for the administration and promotion of the work of the Church as a whole. Among its functions are: to review the records and work of the Presbyteries in cooperation with the Presbyteries concerned to constitute new Presbyteries and, where necessary, to divide those previously constituted to initiate such work with respect to the Presbyteries, the churches and the people under their care as may tend to promote the edification of the church and the extension of the kingdom of God; to elect delegates to the General Council and to propose to the General Council for its consideration such measures as may be of common interest to the cause of Christ and to the Church as a whole.

V.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

1. *Functions.*

The responsibility of the General Council is to foster and express the substantial unity of The United Church of Christ in faith, polity, purpose, and work; to consult upon and devise measures and maintain agencies for the promotion of the common interests of the Church and the kingdom of God; to do and promote the work of the whole Church in its national, international and ecumenical relations and in general to perform on behalf of The United Church of Christ the various functions hitherto performed by such organizations as the National Convention, General Assembly, General Synod, General Conference, or General Council of the uniting denominations.

2. *Membership.*

The General Council is composed of approximately 1,000 delegates, ministers and laymen in equal numbers, to be elected as follows: each Presbytery elects two delegates — one minister and one lay member; the remaining number of delegates, ministers and lay members in equal numbers, are elected by the Conferences on the basis of church membership, the ratio to be determined by the General Council. The number of members of the congregational, episcopal and presbyterian classification elected to the General Council by a Conference are in ratio to the number of churches of each classification in that Conference. The bishops are ex-officio members of the General Council with right to speak but not to vote.

3. *Voting.*

Decisions of the General Council are normally by majority vote, but if called for by any member of the Council, votes may be taken by classification, congregational, episcopal and presbyterian, a majority vote in each classification to apply to the churches of that classification (and no other classification) in The United Church of Christ.

4. Meetings.

The General Council holds regular meetings biennially. Special meetings may be called by the Executive Committee. Each session elects its presiding officer, who may be either a minister or layman, to be known as Moderator, to serve during that session of the General Council, and who is not eligible for re-election. In addition to its agenda for the transaction of business, it provides services of worship and a program of inspirational, evangelistic, missionary, devotional and educational addresses for the edification of those present and of the whole Church. Provision is also made for the General Council to conduct a service of consecration of newly elected bishops.

5. Responsibilities.

The General Council is responsible for coordinating and administering the general enterprise of The United Church of Christ as a whole, including evangelism, missions at home and abroad, ecumenical activity, Christian education, ministerial education, stewardship, publishing, ministerial pensions, social action; and to these ends, it creates such corporations and appoints such boards, commissions, committees and officers as may be needful. It recognizes and fosters organizations of men, women and youth within the membership of The United Church of Christ. The responsibilities of the General Council are discharged on behalf of the constituent local churches, Presbyteries, and Conferences.

6. The Appeal Agency.

For the determination of complaints and reference by individual members, churches, Presbyteries or Conferences an Appeal Agency is constituted consisting of eleven members: six ministers and five laymen, elected by the General Council, the term of office to be four years, and the membership to be distributed among the three categories.

7. Conference of Bishops.

The bishops meet in conference at least once a year, and issue an address on "The State of the Church," setting forth suggestions of procedures and programs as well as an examination of matters spiritual. The bishops when in conference consult together for the unifying of their administrations.

8. Executive Commission.

In the interim between General Council meetings an Executive Commission is constituted as the administrative agency of The United Church of Christ. It is composed of eight bishops, elected by the Conference of Bishops, twenty members elected by the General Council, ten ministers and ten laymen, two women elected by the Women's Society of The United Church of Christ, and four members elected by the Council of Secretaries of the General Boards. The three categories are all to be represented.

For the purposes of effective administration consideration is given to provincial or regional administrative units.

VI.

TOWARD A MORE PERFECT UNION

The United Church of Christ is predicated upon mutual respect and appreciation of the precious traditions in thought and practice which each participating body brings to the union. It is committed to spiritual freedom. It does not desire conformity in practice or uniformity in thought except as our fellowship in work and prayer draws us closer to each other. We believe, however, that the fullest measure of organic union presupposes an ever-widening degree of common polity, common forms and materials of worship, and common ways of thought. As we grow in oneness of heart and mind, it seems inevitable that we would appropriate more of each other's traditions and, beyond any of those traditions, develop new traditions of worship and polity which would express our spiritual unity. It is suggested, therefore, that with the establishment of The United Church of Christ, some commission on study and appraisal be appointed, adequately representing our various traditions, to review the progress of the union, to encourage steps toward achieving higher levels of oneness in life and work and worship, and to propose such practical instruments of common life as a hymnal, a book of worship, orderly forms of ecclesiastical procedure and the like.

CONCLUSION

We, the Conference on Church Union, offer the foregoing Plan of Union in the belief that ultimately such an organic union rests upon faith in one another and in the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit. The achievement of a United Church is a spiritual development as well as an organizational event. We make no claim to finality or perfection in the concept of such a Church as is here set forth. We submit it in all humility to the several Churches for their prayerful consideration, study, criticism, and suggestions.

In its wide-spread consideration, we prayerfully trust that the proposed union may be approached and its study controlled, not by a too meticulous concern for minor or technical details, but by confidence in the Christian character, disposition, and spirit of the other churches as well as one's own. If our union can be consummated in such an atmosphere of faith, many lesser matters may wisely be left for adjustment in the joyous experience of living together in one fold under one Shepherd.



A Commentary by Disciples on "A Plan of Union"

A Covering Letter from the Disciples Study Group of the Conference on Church Union

HEREWITH is a report of the study of the "Plan of Union for a United Church" conducted among Disciples of Christ by the Council on Christian Unity (formerly Association for the Promotion of Christian Unity).

We shall describe first of all the procedure followed in the study of the Plan. Late in 1953, copies of the Plan were sent to the heads of major boards and agencies, to the faculties of our theological seminaries, and to the commissioners of the Association for the Promotion of Christian Unity. From these persons various thoughtful comments were received.

In 1954, a request was sent from the Council on Christian Unity to conveners in twenty-four communities asking each of them to constitute a local study committee made up of ministers, laymen, women, young people, and other representative Disciples, to study the "Plan of Union" and to give us suggestions regarding it. Ten such groups actually met and discussed the Plan. Each of them elected a chairman and a "scribe," who submitted to our director of Ecumenical Study a written report of the discussions and recommendations of the group. To guide the group in its discussion of the document, a series of questions was prepared. This questionnaire with an analysis of the responses is enclosed.

On October 25 and 26, 1955, a meeting was held in Indianapolis made up of representatives from the various local groups which had met and of a few other Disciples selected to represent particular geographical regions or special areas of interest in the life of our communion. The members of this meeting carefully considered the "Plan of Union" and took up the suggestions which had been made by the various local study commissions. Our report to the Conference on Church Union is the work of this Indianapolis meeting.

The major portion of our report is found in the attached document which proposed certain amendments in the wording of the Plan.

We believe it most important to report that the general response from our local groups and particularly from the national group assembled in Indianapolis was one of genuine commitment to the basic structure of the "Plan of Union." As we discussed the Plan, we were mindful of many problems for our people. Our zeal for the

Plan, however, increased as our discussion went on. It would not be a sound judgment to say that Disciples generally today would vote for the Plan of Union, but we are happy to report that those who have been most deeply involved in the study of the Plan find their enthusiasm for it increasing. We do want to convey to the Conference on Church Union this note of our continued commitment to the great task in which the several communions here represented have united and express once again our hope that the goal before us will be reached in God's good time.

In all honesty and fairness we must state that there are certain problems which the Plan presents to Disciples of Christ. We believe it wise to indicate these.

First, we mention the place of women in the life of the United Church. We received from one of the study groups a most incisive document prepared by one of its members entitled, "Is This a One-Sex Church Plan?" The document pointed out that if the presbyteries are constituted as now suggested in the Plan with one minister and one layman from each church, and if the conferences are constituted by the presbyteries, and the General Council by the presbyteries and conferences, there may be no women in the General Council. We believe that the point is well taken and that the Plan as now stated unwittingly leaves women out of the organized life of the Church. We have, therefore, proposed that the presbytery be constituted of ministers to churches and of two lay members from each church, thus leaving the door open for the appointment of one woman and one man from each congregation but not making this procedure mandatory. We must insist that if the proposal we have made for the constitution of the presbytery be not adopted by the Conference on Church Union, thorough attention be given to some other means of providing an adequate representation of women in the institutional life of the Church.

We believe that more careful thought must be given and specific recommendations made, concerning the place of members of staffs of agencies, professors in theological seminaries, and ministers engaged in the general work of the Church. In most cases, such persons should not be members of the presbytery: it deals with problems with which they are not primarily concerned, and in some places they would overwhelm it in numbers. Yet such workers ought to have a voice in, and a sense of identification with, the responsible life of the Church. Perhaps they should be distributed among the conferences on some equitable basis.

The use of such ecclesiastical terms as presbytery, moderator, and especially bishop will disturb a good many Disciples. Practically all of us who have studied the "Plan of Union" with any care are quite willing to accept the bodies or offices described by these terms and even to accept the words themselves. We do believe, however, that the Conference on Church Union ought to be reminded of the difficulty which these terms will present to many of our people. We do not think the difficulty is insuperable, but time must be given in order for the terms to become acceptable. The concept of the episcopal office as set forth in the document requires, we believe, careful thought. The Disciples who have studied the Plan of Union are not opposed to the inclusion of the episcopal system within the Plan of Union. We must, however, indicate most clearly that we do not now accept nor can we foresee the possibility of our people accepting the notion of the episcopacy as a separate order within the Church. We realize that this notion is nowhere stated in the Plan and that it is foreign to the thinking of all the churches belonging to the Conference on Church Union. Nevertheless, there is among many of us a fear of such a phrase as "consecration for life." We do not want to be unreasonable about these fears.

We should like to convey our conviction that our study of the Plan indicates the need for certain issues to be studied more intensively across denominational lines before the Plan is finally formulated and released to the denominations. We, therefore, propose that the Conference on Church Union initiate certain interdenominational studies among theological seminaries, groups of scholars, and ministers, to consider such matters at a fundamental theological and ecclesiastical level.

Among such matters needing study we mention the following:

1. The office of bishop and the relation of ministerial ordination to episcopal consecration.
2. Physical and legal requisites of a United Church (continuity or merger of existing agencies; status of administrative staff; etc.).

Once again we express our pledge of continuing commitment to the work of the Conference on Church Union. It is our hope that as other communions enter into intensive study of the Plan, they too will find their interest increasing and that the fulfillment of the United Church described by the Plan may one day become a reality.

RONALD E. OSBORN,
For the Working Group.

**Questionnaire, With Analysis of Responses From Local Study
Groups of Disciples of Christ to Questions Regarding
the Greenwich Plan of Union**

NOTE: Responses which could be tabulated were received from nine groups which analyzed the Greenwich Plan of Union. The total number of persons participating in these nine groups is about seventy-five. The decision of a group was not always unanimous. The report on each question indicates the decision of at least a majority of each group.

The Conference on Church Union is now seeking widespread contribution from many Christians in the task of sketching the possible outlines of a united church. The Plan as here presented is by no means final, but represents prayerful thinking of scores of leaders across a period of years. The Conference on Church Union needs to know whether or not it is working in the right direction. Groups are, therefore, asked to concentrate their attention on the major features of the Plan and to answer each of the questions found below.

1. Is the group willing for Disciples of Christ (Christian Churches) to join in a large-scale union of American Protestant communions to form a United Church (not necessarily on the basis of the present plan)?

Seven groups voted "yes," and the other two voted "yes" with some reservations.

2. The Plan assumes that, beyond the local congregation, the New Testament does not lay down an authoritative plan of organization (for conventions, associations, missionary societies, benevolent agencies, and the like), but leaves the churches free to work out expedients suited to the time. Does the group agree with this assumption?

Eight groups voted "yes," and the other group voted "yes" with reservations.

3. If the "Plan of Union" were submitted for a vote in its present form, would the group favor it?

Four groups voted "yes," two groups voted "yes" with reservations, and three groups voted "no."

4. Would their congregations favor the Plan?

Three groups voted "yes" with reservations, five groups voted "no," and one group did not give a clear answer.

5. Is Christian freedom, which we have sought to guarantee under our congregational polity, adequately preserved by the Plan?

Three groups voted "yes," five groups voted "yes" with reservations, and one group expressed reservations without answering "yes" or "no."

6. Does the group agree that ordination to the ministry is a matter which concerns the whole church and should be carried out under broader auspices than that of one congregation?

All nine groups voted "yes."

7. Does the group accept names historically associated with other traditions (bishops, presbytery, conference, moderator, general council) for the specific functions outlined in the Plan?

Four groups voted "yes," three groups voted "yes" with reservations, and two groups voted "no."

8. Would the group accept these functions under other names? If so, what names?

All nine groups voted "yes."

9. Does the group accept the delegate method of constituting presbytery, conference, and general council?

Six groups voted "yes" and three groups voted "yes" with reservations.

10. What features of the Plan should be entirely eliminated or drastically revised?

Could not be given a simple "yes" or "no."

11. What additional features should be added to the Plan?

Could not be given a simple "yes" or "no."

12. If four or more communions voted for union on the basis of the Plan (though perhaps modified), does the group feel Disciples could rightly justify continued separate existence?

One group voted "yes," five groups voted "no," and the others gave an answer in the form of a discussion.

13. Has the group suggestions for the Conference concerning procedure, further revisions, study and interpretation?

Could not be given a simple "yes" or "no."

**Comments From a Special Working Group of Disciples of Christ
on a Plan of Union for a United Church
(Conference on Church Union)**

NOTE: Our comments are presented generally in the form of proposed amendments to the "Plan of Union." In some instances we follow these proposals with brief interpretative statements. Page and line references are to the Revised Draft of May 22, 1953.

THE APPROACH

Page 5, line 3:

Revise the new sentence beginning in this line to read as follows:

"The fundamental problem which it seeks to solve is that of bringing into one body communions which regard one another as belonging to the Church of Christ, and whose members recognize one another as Christians, but who find themselves separated by inherited traditions. These traditions have expressed themselves in congregational, episcopal, and presbyterial forms of organization."

Resume regular reading of the document in line 8 with the sentence beginning "Previous plans . . ."

COMMENT: Note that in order to have coordinate adjectives and also to avoid the use of the name of one of the existing denominations to describe a type of policy, we are suggesting here and throughout the Plan without further comment hereafter the use of the adjective "presbyterial" rather than "presbyterian."

Page 5, par. 3, lines 1, 2:

Italicize the phrase, "*not with the expectation that they will at once commit themselves to union under it.*"

Page 5, par. 3, line 3:

Remove quotation marks and italicize the words, "*in principle.*"

Page 5, par. 4, line 6:

Change the word "crystalize," to "formulate."

I. THE DIVINE IMPERATIVE:

Page 6, full par. 2:

We urge that the drafting committee of the Conference on Church Union reword this paragraph. We desire to maintain the sense of urgency which it seeks to express, but are convinced that this sense of urgency should arise from the Divine imperative and not from the church's fear from mere pragmatic considerations. We found it difficult to make suitable adjustments in the present wording and believe that the paragraph should be rewritten. We believe that the first word, "Today," should be stricken; the church is constantly facing a crisis in the world and must never be divided. The statement should indicate the timelessness of the challenge here suggested and the inadequacy of the church to cope with its mission in any age if it is divided. We particularly object to the clause "that the churches shall make common cause." This sounds too much like a last resort of a little group of defeated men; we should prefer a reference to the witness of a United Church. One member of our group suggested the following as a possible substitute paragraph:

"In a world of fear, hatred, distress, and division, God has given the churches a message of reconciliation and a oneness which will bind all men to Him, and in Him to one another. But we cannot demonstrate our unity in Him, nor clearly proclaim His message, nor, therefore, confront men in their divisions when we too are divided. In the meantime men live and die separated from Him. It is imperative that we seek to realize the oneness God has given to us for proclaiming His love to all men."

Page 6, full par. 3:

In the light of our suggestion regarding the preceding paragraph we propose that this entire paragraph be deleted; it seems weak and unnecessary. There has already been a strong statement on the Divine imperative and the revision proposed above should stress the urgent practical need for a United Church.

Page 6, full par. 4:

Beginning with the last words in line 3, let the principle clause read as follows: "We are convinced that the churches we represent should now form themselves into an organic union; and that this union must be . . ." (let the paragraph proceed as written in the document.)

II. THE COMMON FAITH:

We propose that this title be changed to: "A TESTIMONY TO OUR UNITY."

COMMENT: As we examine this entire section we are convinced that is not fundamentally a statement of faith. An examination of the opening words of each sentence indicates that it is an affirmation of those elements which we hold in common; namely, faith, belief, spirit of love, and purpose. We believe that the title proposed is a more accurate description of the contents and avoids giving the impression that the articles herein contained are a creed. For those who desire to regard the passage as a testimony of faith, the essentially creedal section remains.

Page 7, line 8:

For the words "Holy Catholic Church" substitute the words, "The Church, The Body of Christ."

Page 7, lines 16 through 20:

Delete this entire paragraph. Nothing new is stated here and the sentiments expressed are out of place within the structure of the entire section.

Page 7, full par. 5:

Substitute the following:

"We are one in our purpose to be formed into one United Church of Christ, and in our hope that our labors will be used of Him to further His redemptive work in the world."

THE PLAN OF UNION

A Covenant of Union;

Page 7, full par. 6, line 5:

In the phrase, "The United Church of Christ," here and throughout the document, we propose that the article "The" be not capitalized. It is our conviction that the corporate name ought to imply no arrogance. If the definite article is omitted from the corporate title, it will seem more humble and a more accurate description of what has actually been achieved.

Page 7, full par. 6, lines 6, 7:

For the final sentence substitute the following two new paragraphs:
 "We the members of the Churches hereto assenting, in the sight of God who has called us all as His people, solemnly bind ourselves to one another in Holy Covenant as members of the United Church of Christ."

"We all, corporately and individually, that we may give organic expression to the unity which God has graciously created among us, mutually covenant and agree upon the following Plan of Union."

COMMENT: It is our conviction that the Covenant of Union ought to be made not only by the ecclesiastical bodies or denominations which vote to go into the union, but also by every member of these communions who comes a part of the United Church. We wish to provide in the Covenant an opportunity for each member as a high and solemn spiritual act to register his own personal Covenant of Union with all the other people of God with whom he is now brought into union.

It is also our conviction that the Covenant of Union binds us primarily to one another in a United Church and that the "Plan of Union" is merely the instrument which gives institutional expression to our unity. It seems important, therefore, that the emphasis in the Covenant should be on the union to which we are committing ourselves and not on the institutional

matter of adopting a scheme. We believe that corporate *and* individual assent to the Covenant are both important.

I. THE LOCAL CHURCH:

1. *Organization:*

Page 8, line 2:

We propose that the intimate logical relations between these first two sentences be emphasized more clearly by changing the period at the end of line 23 to a colon and beginning the word "The" in the next line "the

We propose that this second phrase read, "the local church is the ecumenical Church" rather than "the ecumenical Church." For the sake of uniformity we propose that the word, "universal" in line 1 and the word "ecumenical" in line 3 both be written in lower case or in upper case, the practice be uniform.

Page 8, lines 4 through 7:

We propose a slight alteration in order that the sentence may read as follows:

"In the United Church of Christ the freedom of each local church is recognized and respected in the discharge of its local responsibilities and means is provided for the exercise of the mutual responsibilities, etc."

2. *Union in the Local Community:*

Page 8, paragraphs 3, 4, 5:

We propose the deletion of this entire passage as being irrelevant and dealing essentially with the present problem of comity rather than the situation which will prevail within the life of the United Church. We propose as a substitute the following wording:

"In the United Church of Christ local churches seek to manifest the wholeness of Christ in every particular community. They are, therefore, committed to one another, sharing their gifts, their planning, and their concerns."

3. *Classification:*

Page 8, par. 6:

We propose adding to the present paragraph on classification, the following:

"Variations on and combinations of these three historic polities may be worked out by congregations in consultation with the presbytery, the bishop, and the conference. In such cases, the congregations involved may be classified as related to any, to all, or to none of the three other categories."

COMMENT: The purpose of this amendment is to suggest the desirability of experimentation within the life of the United Church in an effort to move toward a common polity and to escape a rigidity of classification implicit in the present Plan. If such a suggestion seems feasible, it can doubtless be clarified. If adopted, it should be written into the Plan in other places as well.

5. *Admission to membership:*

Page 9, lines 2, 3:

We propose that the clause beginning with the words, "new members are received," be altered to read as follows:

"new members are received by baptism upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."

We commend to the drafting committee the consideration of the possible use of a scriptural phrase, such as that found in Peter's confession, in place of the words, "Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior."

Page 9, lines 5, 6:

We propose placing a period after the words, "the receiving local church," and the deletion of the rest of the sentence which now stands.

COMMENT: It is our feeling that the clause which follows is fundamentally weak. We believe that the hope there expressed is implicit in the nature of the Plan and will doubtless be realized. The explicit expression of these words in the Plan will confront some of our people with considerable difficulty and cause some unnecessary antagonism against the Plan.

6. *Property:*

Page 9, par. 2:

We propose that a permissive option be granted in order to hasten the progress of fuller union within the United Church. We propose that the last part of the first sentence in this phrase read as follows:

"The church may retain the title or transfer it in trust to the United Church." The second sentence will remain as it stands except that the article "The" will be changed to "the."

II. THE MINISTRY:

We commend to the drafting committee a consideration of the advisability of moving this section down in the document to follow the present section V, "The General Council." If this were to be done, then the entire structural organization of the Church would be presented in sequence. As the document now stands, the section on the Ministry makes frequent reference to Presbytery, Conference, and General Council, whose functions have not yet been described.

1. *Ordination:*

Page 9, par. 3, line 3:

After the words, "by the Presbytery," insert the following: "at the petition of the candidate and on," then proceed with the sentence as written.

Page 9, par. 3:

Alter the final sentence to read as follows:

"As representative of the conference and the General Council, the bishop normally participates along with other ministers and lay members in the laying on of hands and ordinarily presides at the service of ordination."

2. *Classification:*

Page 9, par. 4:

Add to the paragraph the following sentence:

"However, the bishop and presbytery, with consent of the minister, may transfer him from one category to another without advance announcement."

4. *Placement of Ministers:*

Add to the sentence the following:

"or to local churches of another category by action of bishop and presbytery and with consent of the minister and congregation involved."

COMMENT: The purpose of this amendment as of that immediately preceding is to provide greater flexibility. We believe that the Church needs to protect itself against immoderate transfers from one category to another for purely personal or trivial reasons. At the same time, we believe that the duly constituted administration of the Church should have the freedom to transfer ministers or congregations from one category to another in order to strengthen the bonds of union within the Church.

6. *The Episcopate:*

Page 9, par. 8:

Revise the opening portion of the sentence to read as follows:

"The bishop is an ordained minister who is the spiritual counsellor, etc."

Page 10, full par. 1, lines 2, 3:

Change the sentence beginning, "He is consecrated" to read as follows:

"He is consecrated to his office by the General Council" and delete "for life."

COMMENT: It is our conviction that since the words which follow imply that the General Conference may not deem it expedient to continue a minister in the office of bishop for life, it is not wise to complicate the situation by consecrating him for life.

III. THE PRESBYTERY:

1. *Nature of the Presbytery:*

Page 10, full par. 3, lines 5, 6:

Revise the phrase, "denominations participating in the United Church of Christ" to read "denominations which have entered into the United Church of Christ."

COMMENT: Elsewhere throughout the document it is assumed that the United Church of Christ is an existing body and that the constituent denominations have ceased to exist. Nowhere do we want to imply that they continue a separate existence.

Page 10, after full par. 3:

Introduce here a heading to read, "2. *How Constituted.*" This makes the section on the Presbytery coordinate with that on the Conference.

Note that the numbers on the following headings in this section must then be changed.

Page 10, full par. 4, lines 3 through 5:

Delete the sentence beginning, "It consists," as now written and substitute the following:

"It consists of all ministers to local churches and of two lay members from each church within its district."

COMMENT: It is our conviction that to include all ministers living within the bounds of the presbytery would complicate its life, particularly when theological seminaries or office boards and agencies of the church are located in a given district. We believe that every minister of the United Church should find his place in its institutional life at the point where his ministry is involved. Most general workers have no concern

with the affairs of the presbytery, but rather with those of the conference or even of the General Council.

We are proposing two lay members from each congregation for two reasons: (1) in order to strengthen lay participation in the life of the presbytery, and (2) in order to make a place for women in the organizational life of the United Church. We do not want to make it mandatory that one of the two representatives from each local church shall be a woman, but we expect that this will likely happen in many cases.

3. Meetings:

Page 10, full par. 6, line 2:

Change "at least five members" to read "at least five member churches."

COMMENT: If our proposal for increased lay representation is accepted, the church (with three ministers) or at most two churches could call a special meeting of the presbytery. At least five churches should be concerned.

5. Functions:

Page 11, line 3:

Reword clause (c) to read as follows:

the standing of and the passing upon the character of its ministers."

Page 11, line 6:

After the words, "constituent churches," change the semi-colon to a comma and add the words: "including the establishment and location of churches;"

IV. THE CONFERENCE:

2. How Constituted:

Page 11, par. 3, line 2:

Change the word, "laymen" to "lay members." We are proposing this change throughout the document wherever the term "laymen" appears.

Page 11, par. 3:

Add to the paragraph the following sentence:

"In addition to delegations from the presbyteries, ministers in general service and executive heads of institutions whose area of responsibility approximates the conference area shall be *ex officio* members of conference without the right to vote."

COMMENT: The purpose here is to give to ministers engaged in teaching and administrative work of the church an opportunity to participate in the life of the conference without swamping it with their votes.

3. Voting:

Page 11, par. 4, line 2:

Change the phrase "the delegation from any presbytery" to "at least one member."

COMMENT: The reason for this change is that a delegation from each presbytery is made up of members of the three categories and would, therefore, present to a person desiring a vote by categories the same difficulty as the conference itself would present.

4. Meetings:

Page 11, par. 5:

Alter the first line to give a continuing sentence as follows:

"The conference convenes at least once a year and elects," then let the rest of the paragraph proceed.

5. *Election of Bishops:*

Page 11, par. 6:

Change the title, "Election of Bishops," to read "Continuing Responsibility."

Insert the following paragraph:

"Each conference shall elect a continuing administrative committee broadly representative of the geographical areas of the conference, which will exercise administrative responsibility between annual meetings of the conference."

Now let follow the final paragraph of page 11 as the second paragraph in the section "Continuing Responsibility," and add the following paragraph:

"The bishop is general administrator in behalf of the conference, and jointly with the continuing administrative committee, is responsible to the conference."

6. *Functions of the Conference:*

Page 12, line 3:

After the phrase, "work of the presbyteries," insert the following: "to review the records and work of the bishop, committees, and agencies of the United Church responsible to the conference,".

Page 12, lines 7 and 8:

Rephrase to read as follows:

"to promote the edification and extension of the church and its work:"

Page 12, line 10:

Change the word "measure" to "measures."

V. THE GENERAL COUNCIL:

1. *Functions:*

Page 12, par. 2:

Change the heading, "Functions," to read: "Nature of the General Council."

COMMENT: The reason for the proposed change is to make the headings in the document coordinate throughout. With the slight emendation which we propose below, the statement as here written becomes an exposition of the nature of the General Council.

Begin the first paragraph of this section as follows:

"The General Council is a congregation of Jesus Christ charged with the care of all the churches, with the witness of the United Church of Christ to the Gospel in all the world, and with the unity of all the churches in faith, policy, purpose and work. Its purpose is to foster and express, etc."

3. *Voting:*

Page 12, par. 4:

Change the passage to read as follows:

"Decisions of the General Council are normally by majority vote, but a vote by classifications may be called for according to the following procedure: in case of any vote before the General Council or any vote just taken, any member of the council may move a vote by classifications. If

is motion is seconded, and if it is sustained by 25% of the members of the Council, the presiding officer shall then declare that a vote be taken by classifications. In case of a vote by classifications, congregational, episcopal and presbyterial," etc., to the end of the paragraph, except that in line 8 "to apply" becomes "shall apply."

COMMENT: We propose this procedure for calling for a vote by classifications as the most responsible and expeditious way of getting the matter before the General Council. If any member of the Council may call for a vote by classifications, some individual is likely to demand this on nearly every question before the Council. If the requirement is proposed that a certain number of members must call for the vote, confusion will be introduced into the business sessions as members circulate about trying to get a sufficient number of sponsors for the call. Under the procedure proposed, the count may be quickly taken in an orderly fashion. If the call for a vote by classifications is sustained it may then be quickly taken; if it is voted down, the matter is disposed of. We have no particular insistence upon the figure of 25%. We do believe that there should be a fairly sizeable body of opinion within the General Council demanding a vote by classification before this kind of vote is taken.

4. Meetings:

Page 13, line 2:

Change "Executive Committee" to "Executive Commission" (see section 8, below).

Page 13, line 8:

Change "those present" to read "delegates and visitors."

COMMENT: The purpose of this change is to make explicit the implicit suggestion that other members of the United Church besides official delegates may be permitted to attend the sessions of the General Council as visitors.

Page 13, line 10:

To the sentence as it now concludes add the three words, "to their office."

5. Responsibilities:

Page 13, par. 2:

Change the heading, "Responsibilities," to read "Functions of the General Council."

Page 13, par. 2, line 5:

After the words, "ministerial pensions" insert the word "benevolence."

6. The Appeal Agency:

Page 13, par. 3:

Change the heading, "The Appeal Agency" to "Commission on Appeals."

As a substitute for the first part of this paragraph we propose the following wording:

"For the reconciliation of differences, the General Council may refer disputed matters, or individuals, members, churches, presbyteries, or conferences may appeal from a decision of the General Council to the Commission on Appeals, which consists of eleven members: six ministers and five lay members, elected by and reporting to the General Council." Let the rest of the paragraph proceed as written in the document.

7. *Conference of Bishops:*

Page 13, par. 4:

We propose that these lines be rephrased as follows:

"The bishops meet in conference at least once a year, and may address the Church, suggesting, etc." Let the rest of the sentence continue as the document.

Omit the last sentence of the paragraph.

8. *Executive Commissions*

Page 13, par. 5, lines 3 through 7:

Instead of the sentence beginning, "It is composed," we propose the following:

"It is composed of fifty members elected by the General Council. In constituting the Executive Commission, due attention shall be given to the representation of bishops, ministers, laymen, women, youth, professors and secretaries of the general boards." The final sentence of the paragraph is to stand.

The Doctrine of the Church and the "Plan of Union"¹

Theological Consideration of the "Greenwich Plan"

By William R. Baird, Jr.

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE GREENWICH PLAN

the theological point of view would be to some of its advocates either or dangerous. Is not the very genius of this program of union its shying away from divisive theological complexities? The plan, of course, purposefully has no theological basis, and to subject it to the scrutiny of systematic theology would be to destroy it. Thus, C. C. Morrison, in making a case for the plan, warns the ecumenical discussion that it should not wander off into bypaths of irrelevancy or into the depths of theological and ecclesiological theory which cloud the real issue and obstruct the open discussion.² Dr. Morrison is not opposed to theology *per se*, for he says later in the same article:³

I do not agree with that shallow view of Christian unity which scorns theology and theological discussion and insists that it should have no place in the united church. On the contrary, my view is that a united church is the true place for the consideration of the great themes to which theology is devoted.

In other words, theology should have little or no place in the formulation of a plan of union, but is to be vitally active within the consummated united church. Elsewhere this important drafter of the Greenwich Plan has pointed out the inherent impossibility of achieving, then, now, or ever, any viable permanent union on a plan requiring theological agreement."⁴

This notion that the plan is without theological basis has also been maintained by certain of its critics. Some have insisted that it rests on no historical doctrine of the church. Critics of this sort feel that theology

Reprinted from *ENCOUNTER*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (July, 1957), by permission of the editor. Charles Clayton Morrison, "Protestantism is Ready Now to Become One Church." *The Christian Century* (Jan. 1956) XXVII, 4. Used by permission.

Ibid., 5.

Charles Clayton Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1956), p. 19. Used by permission.

is of vital importance to any program of church union. John Mackay, for example, writes:⁵

One of the greatest needs of the *One Faith* in our time is that the Christian Church should devote itself to the task of elaborating an ecumenical theology. . . . But to repeat words which I have written elsewhere never must the Church of Christ sponsor a blanched, eviscerated, spineless statement of confessional theology. It must give birth in this revolutionary transition time to a full-blooded, loyally Biblical, unashamedly ecumenical, and strongly vertebrate system of Christian belief.

Not only does a plan of union demand a theological basis; it calls for a theology with back-bone.

Careful reading of the Greenwich Plan fails to substantiate full claims of either its advocates or critics. The plan does rest on a theological basis; theological concepts are to be found throughout its pages. The plan contains a statement of "The Common Faith" (p. 7. 4:28)⁶ which involves an affirmation of belief in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It calls for a "Holy Catholic Church" through which the "Kingdom" comes to earth. It speaks of the Scriptures as "disclosing the Word of God for men." In short, this "simple" statement of common belief involves the most fundamental problems of theology, such as Christology and the idea of revelation. The plan even presents a *theological* definition of the nature of the church: "The Universal Church is the fellowship which God creates by his Holy Spirit through those who experience his grace in Jesus Christ" (p. 8. 5:1). To insist that these matters do not involve theology is to confess ignorance of the theological enterprise. Even the basic presupposition of the plan is theological:⁷

The treasures of all our evangelical churches—their doctrines, their politics, their fellowships, their very habits of doing things—can be taken up and embraced in One Church without compromise of conscience or the restriction of Christian freedom. This faith is ultimately derived from Christ the Head of the Church.

A theologian, perhaps, would consider this a doctrine of the unity of the church founded upon a Christology. Therefore, the real question is whether or not the Greenwich Plan is based on theology; it is a question to the validity of the theological presuppositions upon which it rests.

5. John A. Mackay, *God's Order—The Ephesian Letter and this Present Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 141. Used by permission.

6. References in parentheses are to *A Plan for a United Church in the United States*, revised draft of 22 May, 1953, published by the Conference on Church Union. Page references are to the printed edition. The numbers which follow indicate page and line in the earlier mimeographed edition of the same text.

7. Morrison, "Protestantism Is Ready," *op. cit.*, p. 4.

on is not whether or not the plan contains theological concepts; it is a question of the validity and consistency of the theological concepts themselves.

Before attempting to answer these questions, it might be well to clarify the presuppositions and methods of this paper. This study is made from a particular point of view: that of a "Disciple of Christ" who works in the discipline of biblical theology. The effort is to help to clarify the theological issues involved in the plan, so that those who guide its destiny may evaluate its effectiveness for bringing about the one church. No attention will be given to matters of strategy in the employment of the plan or to the practical details involved in such matters as the merging of missionary and educational institutions. These important non-theological factors which seem highly complex to the theologian, must be left to more competent hands. The intention here is to deal solely with theological matters. The procedure will be to consider first the doctrine of the church from the viewpoint of historical and contemporary theology and then to discuss the biblical view of the nature of the church. (Biblical quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version*.) In this preliminary discussion emphasis will be placed on the theological and biblical concepts of the unity of the church and references will be made to particular problems which concern the Greenwich Plan. Finally, the plan itself will be considered theologically in the light of the foregoing discussion.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

The term "church" can be used in a variety of ways. Stephen Neill lists six senses of the word in common usage: the mystical church, the visible church, the historical church, the local congregation, the national church and the denomination.⁸ These ways of using the term, some of which are quite unsophisticated, serve to point out a basic truth about the church: its transcendental-immanent character.⁹

The church is transcendent. It is a mystical body involving man's relation to the risen Christ. It is the invisible company of all the redeemed of all the ages. This transcendent church is infallible, united, eter-

⁸ Stephen Neill, *The Christian Society* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 296 ff.

⁹ A similar view of this dual character of the Church is expressed by William Nichols, "Ecumenical Movement and the Doctrine of the Church," *The Ecumenical Review*, IV (1951), 21-23. He makes a distinction between the "eschatological" and the "historical" church. Eschatologically the church possesses an essential, given unity; historically it exemplifies the unity of the church. Only as the two aspects of the church are held in tension can a dynamic and meaningful unity be achieved.

nal, known only to God.¹⁰ The church is also immanent.¹¹ It is a community of people who have lived in history and worshiped in certain localities. It has organized itself within national boundaries and into denominational patterns. Many theologians would be hesitant to admit that national denominational divisions are really worthy of the theological designation "church"¹² but even these questionable usages indicate the necessity of the church's having concrete embodiment in the world and in history. William Robinson, insisting that the church is an extension of the incarnation, points out that the church shares all of the dualities of Christ: it is divine and human, temporal and eternal, local and universal, in the world and not in the world, weak yet powerful, fallible and infallible.¹³ The church must have concrete, visible form, but any program which attempts to give it that form must never forget that it is the one, invisible, eternal church.

A more studied manner for considering the historic and contemporary views of the church is to discuss the way the church has viewed its own relation to history. C. C. Morrison, following this line, suggests that Protestantism can be divided according to two major types of ecclesiology: the historicist and the restorationist.¹⁴ According to this analysis, the restorationist "churches" are those which stress their continuity with history and emphasize the catholicity of the church. The Episcopalians stress the historic episcopate; the Lutherans, the creedal orthodoxy of the Augsburg Confession; the Presbyterians, the continuity of the covenant community in history. The restorationist "churches," on the other hand, view the history of Christianity as a story of continual apostasy; they attempt to leap across centuries to find unity with the church of the New Testament. This ecclesiology of history is of great significance for anyone concerned with the unity of American denominations, since, according to Morrison, of the largest "churches" in the United States (those embodying 92% of American Protestants) thirty claim to have restored the New Testament church. The Congregationalists stress the supposed local autonomy of the church; the Baptists, its practice of believer's baptism by immersion;

10. For the growing importance of the concept of the invisible church in contemporary theology cf. J. Robert Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption* (Greenwich, Connecticut: The Seabury Press, 1956), p. 160 ff.

11. Throughout this paper, the term "immanent" in reference to the church means that the church dwells in the world, in history. The word is not used to mean indwelling within man if the church were a sort of inner feeling, experience or attitude.

12. Compare, for example, Morrison, *Unfinished Reformation*, 48 ff, who argues convincingly that the denominations have usurped the function of the church.

13. William Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church* (St. Louis: The Bethany House Publishing Co., 1955 rev. ed., p. 115 ff. The idea of the church as an extension of the incarnation, which has become popular with many theologians, should be employed only with great caution. For example, to take the concept literally would mean the identification of the church and Christ. (Cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 95 ff.).

14. Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 130 ff.

dists, its spontaneous and vital spiritual life; the Disciples, its "polity" or worship plus its concept of a non-creedal unity.

Students of the Greenwich Plan should take seriously this division of "churches" according to their view of history, since some of the groups desiring to unite are reformist "churches" (Evangelical and Reformed, and Presbyterian) while others are restorationist "churches" (Congregational, Wesleyan, Methodist). Morrison insists that the reformist "churches" are more readily able to participate in ecumenical activities than the restorationists. The reformist idea of history allows its advocates to view their past as participating in the relativities of history; their origin is not some absolute, infallible, divine event. This also makes them conscious of a historical affinity with all other Protestant groups. The restorationists, however, believe themselves to have restored the true church whose origin was in the action in Christ and whose constitution is a divinely inspired blueprint of the New Testament. This unhistorical view of their origin leads to a scorn for all other churches (even other restorationist churches) which they consider to be tainted with the relativities of history—relativities which they naively suppose themselves to have escaped. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: *these differences involve theology*. The immediate problem is a theology of history which implies the question of tradition. The question of tradition is complexly related to the deeper problem of the authority of the New Testament and the idea of revelation. No plan of union involving reformist or restorationist churches (or any two of the latter) can ignore these theological problems.

Three possibilities present themselves: (1) a program may be carried out whereby all the "churches" are converted to the position of one in regard to theological matters—an unlikely possibility; (2) a plan may be devised which would allow for the different concepts of authority to exist side by side in a united church; (3) a new basis for theological unity may be discovered to which all the "churches" may move without abandoning the essential truths of their own positions. The latter suggestion has at least some merit on the very surface of it, since the reformist "churches" generally agree that their historic continuity begins with the New Testament, while restorationist "churches" are inclined to stress the importance of *their* history.¹⁵ Moreover, the Greenwich planners may be heartened by the fact that union between reformist and restorationist churches is possible as evidenced by the Congregational-Christian-Evangelical and Reformed mer-

The Disciples of Christ, for example, will note the frequency of quotations from Alexander Campbell in their periodicals, the number of recent books about their founding fathers issued by their publishing house, the foundation and growth of their historical society, and the building of a "temple" at Cane Ridge, as some examples.

ger to constitute the United Church of Christ.¹⁶ They should note also according to this analysis, the Methodists have more affinity with the congregational type "churches" than with the episcopal—a designation the plan somewhat inaccurately places upon the Methodists. The Conference on Church Union, however, should be aware that in regard to this of theological problem, the greatest differences will arise between the Presbyterian and the Congregational type "churches."

Theologians usually discuss the problem of the historic conception of the nature of the church by considering the problem theologically; they cover two elementary theories about the church: the catholic and the protestant.¹⁷ Perhaps more adaptable for critical inquiry, however, is Bishop Dun's threefold division of catholic, classical protestant, and "the fellowship of the Spirit."¹⁸ The catholic view emphasizes the objective, institutional, sacramental, and hierarchical nature of the church. The true church is that institution in which properly ordained clergy administer valid sacraments. Walter M. Horton defines the classic protestant idea as follows: "The fundamental Protestant idea is that the church is not above judgment; she is inerrant and 'self-authenticating' as though she were God himself; she is *the servant of God's Word*, and must perpetually be judged by her degree of conformity to that Word."¹⁹ This is similar to Calvin's statement: "whenever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, then we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has a true existence."²⁰ The church here involves both the objectively given Word and man's response of faith.²¹ Still less objective is the "free" church or congregational idea. Here the church is primarily a fellowship of converts and believers. Some free churchmen, along with Zwingli, view baptism and the Lord's Supper as merely symbols or ordinances rather than genuine sacraments. These ordinances, in some congregations, can even be administered by a layman. In fact, there is no inherent difference between clergy and laity; within the church there is simply a difference of function.²²

16. This new body could still conceivably be incorporated within the larger entity envisaged by the Greenwich Plan.—Ed..

17. For this kind of analysis, compare for example, Wm. Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, p. 181 ff.

18. Angus Dun, *Prospecting for a United Church* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 44 ff. By "the fellowship of the Spirit," Bishop Dun refers to what are usually called the "free" or congregational type "churches."

19. Walter M. Horton, *Christian Theology. An Ecumenical Approach* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 235.

20. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans., Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), II, p. 289 (BK IV, I, p. 9).

21. Cf. Horton, *Christian Theology*, p. 234 ff.

22. Cf. Horton, *Christian Theology*, p. 239 ff., and Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, 14

to anyone concerned with the ecumenicity, these three theological of the church give rise to some perplexing questions.²³

1) What is the proper form for the church to take? Some theologians hat it must take one of the above forms, that the true church is limited rticular church order. Others assert that no particular form is neces- whenever God's saving grace is operating, there is the church of Still others confess that any form which so limits the church as to t its unity is a violation of the essential nature of the church; only orm" of the church which expresses and maintains its oneness is valid.

2) Is the church primarily an objective or a subjective institution? urge that it is chiefly objective; administration of the sacraments by rarchy is the true church in operation apart from any lay participa- Others insist on the "priesthood of all believers," incorrectly under- n a radically individualistic sense;²⁴ the true church is the locally ndent, autonomous, democratically controlled, congregation. Still acknowledging some validity in the classic protestant view, believe e true church must hold the objective and subjective in corrective ten- he church is given by God's revelation and received by man's faith. Prenter writes, "Both subjectivism and objectivism in one way or lead to the result that man makes himself God either in deifying ible Church institutions or in deifying his invisible thinking or re- experience."²⁵ The only way to avoid these dangers, seems to be to ledge the dual, indeed paradoxical, nature of the church; that it is, been said above, both transcendent and immanent.

3) What is the nature of the ministry of the church and what is the meaning and form of ordination? Answers range all the way from erarchical" view (a ministry standing in apostolic succession is of ence of the church) to the "anarchical" view (a ministry is not neces- the existence of the church).²⁶ Between these extremes there is a g body of theologians who acknowledge certain truths in episcopal ion while opposing any rigid and mechanical succession doctrine. tion, they claim, is a function of the whole church and a means

cf. discussion of some of the major issues which divide the church by Horton, *Christian* p. 218 ff., and Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, Another listing of major differences in Robert S. Bilheimer, *The Quest for Christian Unity* (New York: Association Press, 61 ff.

for a discussion of this common misunderstanding, cf. Nelson, *Realm of Redemption*, p. ere it is pointed out that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers rightly means y Christian is a priest to others in the community, not to himself.

egin Prenter, "Catholic and Evangelical—a Lutheran View," *Ecumenical Review*, I 88.

cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 142 ff.

whereby the historic continuity of the church can be expressed.²⁷ The "free churchman" like William Robinson can write, "The apostolic character of the church depends on the apostolic commission given by our Lord. His apostles and transmitted by them to successive generations of Christian ministers."²⁸ Only that doctrine of the ministry which expresses the historic continuity and *essential unity* of the church is valid.

(4) What is the nature of the sacraments and who can receive them? Catholic "churches" insist that validly performed sacraments in which God's invisible grace operates uniquely, are an essential of the life of the church. Some congregational type churches, on the other hand, shy from the term "sacrament"; their ordinances involve nothing mystical but are simply symbols or memorials of God's grace which operated in the past. However, most contemporary thinkers believe that Christ is really present in the sacraments (although differing as to the manner of his presence) and that God is acting in the sacraments (although differing as to the conditions under which he acts.)²⁹ The sacraments witness to the transcendent and immanent character of the church; any doctrine of the sacraments which would ignore their transcendent character by considering the sacraments as mere symbols, or any dogma which would insist on a particular mode of their administration, would appear to violate the essential character of the church.

The question of the proper recipients of the sacraments brings up a hotly debated problem of infant *versus* immersion baptism.³⁰ No reconciliation between the opposing parties seems forthcoming at this time. Nonetheless, students of church union in America must take the problem seriously, since over half of the members of Protestant churches in the United States belong to immersionist groups.³¹ It would seem that the general conclusion about the sacraments expressed above might have some validity in this specific problem. To insist that only one mode of baptism is valid would be seriously to limit the operation of God's grace; and so to stifle the activity of the Spirit in baptism as to form a sectarian group, would be to violate the essential unity of the church.³² It seems that a u

27. Cf. Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 159 ff.

28. Wm. Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, p. 179. Robinson also points out that the true apostolic succession is within the church and not the hierarchy (220 ff).

29. Cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 120 ff.

30. For a brief survey of the debate over baptism in contemporary theology, cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 127 ff.

31. Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 166 ff.

32. Morrison, *ibid.*, convincingly advocates that immersionists would do well to practice one mode of baptism within a united church, while at the same time recognizing the validity of other baptismal practices. "Thus freed from the prejudice with which immersion is regarded when offered by a sectarian propagandist, it would make its own appeal on its own merits to Christian intelligence"—p. 173.

h would stand on a sounder *theological* basis, if a variety of sacramental beliefs and practices were advocated within it.

(5) What is the nature of the continuity and unity of the church? I insist that the continuity is historical and to be found in the ministry going on in apostolic succession. This historic continuity also preserves the essential unity of the church for in the one, holy, apostolic institution, the church is one. Men who deviate from the true and infallible church do not divide it, they leave it. On the other hand, some theologians believe the church has and needs no continuity in history. History is the realm of the church's perversion, the story of its human divisions. The unity of the church is to be found in its continuity with the church of the New Testament. Some of this latter group do believe the church has a continuity with the church of Christ; whenever two or three are gathered together he is in their midst. Still others believe that both a "horizontal" and a "vertical" continuity³³ are essential to the life of the church. The church does live in history and is subjected to its relativities, so that no historical expression of continuity is absolute and final. The head of that history is, of course, the church of the New Testament founded by Christ and mediated by the apostles. Yet the head of the church is the living Christ who guides its life in history, who is present in its proclamation and its sacraments. From its fellowship with him it derives its unity—a unity which must gain expression in history, but must not be stereotyped into some particular historic form, the form of the New Testament.

(6) What is the authority for the church? Again answers range all the way from a confession of hierarchical authority to insistence upon the primacy of the individual in an autonomous congregation. Some urge the acceptance of one or more of the historic creeds or councils as authoritative. A growing number of theologians are coming to believe that no human authority, be it priest, or council, or creed, or creedally interpreted Bible, is adequate for the transcendental-immanent church. "It is Jesus Christ himself, then, and not any teaching or ideas about Him, who is the final authority for the church and for all mankind."³⁴ This authority may allow or demand a variety of forms, polities, ministries, and sacraments, but an attempt to avoid this historical variety will destroy the transcendent character of the church and its essential unity.

Even this sketchy survey of certain theological views of the nature of the church has pointed out some of the complex problems which divide the church. Nevertheless, the survey has also given hints at possible solutions—solutions which have been forged in the heat of theological debate.

These terms are borrowed from Horton, *Christian Theology*, 218 ff.
Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 107. Used by permission of the Seabury Press.

It is clear from the discussion that no solution will be effective which demands the conversion of all to one rigid theological view. In fact, it is a question whether *one* view of the nature of the church and its ministry and sacraments would be *theologically* valid. It is also evident, on the other hand, that a program of unity which attempts to ignore theological issues is bound to superficiality. Indeed, it is a question whether an institution founded on no theological basis would be the church. Is it not clear that the united church must be based on a theology, but not the creedal, doctrinal sort of theology which has always divided Christians? Rather it must be founded on a theology which is dynamic and flexible, a theology to which men of all denominations may witness, a theology based on the truth which sums up all lesser truths of the divided "churches." Fuller discussion of this "non-objective" kind of theology will be postponed until later. However, a summary of the previous discussion at this point indicates some of its implications.

(1) It will be a theology which insists that the church must take form in history, but that no form which it takes will be valid unless it expresses the church's essential unity.

(2) It will be a theology that asserts that the church is paradoxical, both objective and subjective, transcendent and immanent, divine and human.

(3) It will be a theology which insists that the church must have a ministry which witnesses to the historical continuity of the church with the world, crystallizing the expression of that continuity into a particular form.

(4) It will be a theology which recognizes both the divine act and the human response in the administration of the sacraments, so that no sectarian mode of administration can be absolutized.

(5) It will be a theology which insists that the church is essentially a unity which has continuity in history, so that no doctrine of its continuity can be valid which disturbs its unity.

(6) It will be a theology which confesses that the authority of the church is Christ who was crucified in history but who is also the Eternal One, so that all lesser truths which we possess may be taken up into the Truth who possesses us and thereby makes us one.

The basic element of all of these conclusions is the nature of the church as in essence a unity. Critics who have charged the Greenwich Plan with resting on no historical doctrine of the church have missed this essential point: *the one thing upon which all historic and contemporary theories of the church agree is its essential unity.* Hence, any plan which attempts to unite the church is by that very attempt standing on the solidest possible theological ground. After making his thorough study of the doctrine of the church in contemporary theology, J. Robert Nelson concludes, "If there

article of the doctrine of the nature of the church which may be seen in the full support of Christians, it is this belief in unity."³⁵ "A divided church in the New Testament sense of the church," says Newbigin, "is something illogical and incomprehensible—as illogical and incomprehensible as human sin."³⁶ In discussing the nature of the church, contemporary theologians are inclined to emphasize doctrines which imply the basic unity of the church such as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit³⁷ and the church as the body of Christ.³⁸ Hence, the current discussions of unity are not urging brotherly association based on the lowest common denominator of men; they are based on profound theological concepts of the very heart of the faith. Most central is the idea of Christ, not a Christology about Christ but a commitment to him who is God's personal revelation of the ultimate divine-human community. "The ground of this assertion that fellowship is the essential nature of reality—what we would see if only our eyes were open to the spiritual nature of things—is not based on philosophical speculation, but is *given* to us in *revelation*, the self-disclosure of God himself."³⁹

THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Most of the doctrines of the church which have been considered so far are to be based on the Bible. It will help to clarify some of the issues, therefore, to consider the New Testament concept of the church. The New Testament inherits from the Old its basic concept of community, namely, the people of God. At Sinai, God had acted to make a covenant with the Israelites; from the mountain he thundered, "You shall be my own possession . . . a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6).⁴⁰ The whole of the nation, however, did not continue to maintain the covenant, so that a remnant within Israel came to compose the true people of God. Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, warned, "For though your people be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return" (10:22).⁴¹ The Hebrew thinkers con-

Ibid., p. 201.

J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 24.

Cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 37 ff.

Ibid., p. 84 ff.

Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Church*, p. 18. A Presbyterian can say essentially the same thing: cf. Mackay, *God's Order*, p. 63: "The community which God wills is a fellowship of love, constituted not to be an evolution in history. It is a community constituted by Christ, who by what He was and did brought God and man and man and man together in fellowship." For Anglican comments in similar vein, see the quotations from L. S. Thornton in Nelson, *Realm of Redemption*, p. 63; cf. also Horton, *Christian Theology*, 207.

For the importance of the covenant idea as a background to the church, cf. Millar Burrows, *Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), p. 146 f.

Cf. George Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 15 ff.

sidered the people of God to be involved in a closely knit unity; this is in their idea of the community as a corporate personality.⁴² Because of this idea, an individual could stand for the whole of the people, as for example the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah or the Son of Man of Daniel. Therefore, the Old Testament presents an idea of the religious community which was created by an act of God, but involving a response of man and resulting in a divine-human unity.

The New Testament describes the church by a series of metaphors. The most literal of these is the church as *ekklesia*. This term, which the Septuagint employed to translate *qahal*, basically means "assembly." In the Old Testament it is used in general for the covenant people united in worship of God.⁴³ The writer of Hebrews says:

For He [Christ] who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren saying, I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation (*ekklesia*) I will praise thee.

In other words, the church is a group of men who are sanctified by Christ as to become his brethren; they are united in an assembly for a common purpose—praise of the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Scholars are agreed that *ekklesia* may be used for the church in its local form (I Cor. 16:16; I Thess. 2:14) or for its universal, united aspect (I Cor. 10:11:22; Col. 1:18, 24).⁴⁵

The New Testament describes the church as the *people of God* thereby takes up the Old Testament idea of the covenant-remnant community.⁴⁶ "But you are a chosen race," writes the author of I Peter "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness" (2:9). Where the church is referred to as the people of the new covenant (I Cor. 3:25; Heb. 8:6 ff.),⁴⁷ the remnant or true Israel (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:6-

42. Cf. Jenkins, *The Strangeness of Church*, p. 25 ff.

43. Here the concise analysis of Ethlebert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. Marsh (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 153 ff, will in the main be followed.

44. Cf. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 35 ff; Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, p. 295.

45. Cf. Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, p. 149; R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1938) p. 18; Johnston, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 115 ff.

46. Cf. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 76 ff.

47. For the significance of this idea for the N. T. church cf. Jenkins, *The Strangeness of Church*, p. 37 ff.

48. Flew's argument that Jesus consciously founded a church, rests to a large degree on Jesus' teaching and action as forming the true Israel, the community of the remnant; cf. *Jesus and His Church*, p. 48 ff.

ect generation (I Pet. 1:2; 2:9),⁴⁰ the saints (Eph. 1:18; Rev. 13:7). The New Testament church recognizes its continuity with the community of the Old Testament, while at the same time asserting its superiority.⁵⁰ The new covenant results from a new act of God—the sending of which involved his death and resurrection (I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:6). This divine action created a united religious community which even though the Old Testament people of God possessed the character of corporate personality. One man could stand for the whole group; "for Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22). The task of this new humanity was to witness to the new life in Christ (1:8).

The New Testament also describes the church as the *flock*. Taking up the ancient idea of the king as shepherd of his people, the Old Testament sometimes referred to the expected messiah as a shepherd-king of the holy people. Consequently, the early church applied this figure to Christ, "the shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). This figure stresses the authority of Christ who kept them from straying (I Pet. 2:25) and proclaimed the oneness of the flock (Acts 20:28). "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold," says the Johannine Christ; "I must bring them and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16).

The New Testament can use vegetable as well as animal metaphors; the church is a *plant*. In Romans 11, Paul speaks of the divine community as an olive tree; the Gentiles, represented as wild branches, are grafted in some part of the tree. The Fourth Gospel describes the church under the figure of a vine (John 15:5).⁵¹ This figure of speech emphasizes the unity of the church; the tree has a common root; the branches gain life through inseparable unity with the vine which is Jesus Christ.

The church is also depicted as a *building* or city (Eph. 2:19 ff.). It is the holy temple in which God's spirit dwells; it is a unity held together by love; it has a continuity in history through the ministry of the apostles.⁵² This historic structure, however, is not in itself eternal, for the citizens of the church await the coming of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2 ff.); the church is transient.

Cf. Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, 105 ff, for importance of this idea.

Cf. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 80 ff.

For other agricultural metaphors, cf. I Cor. 3:6 ff.; II Tim. 2:6; Mt. 13:32.

This idea of continuity in history will be given more force if, with many scholars, the church of Ephesians is taken to be a man of the post-apostolic age rather than Paul. Indeed, this church, which seems to speak of a tradition from the present back to the apostles, back to Christ, is evidence against Pauline authorship.

The Ephesian epistle also presents the church as the *bride of* (5:21 ff.). In admonishing Christian wives and husbands to proper married conduct, the author describes the relation of Christ to the church. Christ is the head and savior of the church, so that it ought to be subject to him. Christ loved the church and died for her so that she might be cleansed and without blemish. Just as husband and wife are joined with one another so that two become one, so also are Christ and the church. This figure, however, emphasizes the authority of Christ, the ideal holiness of the church, the unity within the church through its unity with Christ. This latter point emphasizes again the corporate personality of the church, since it can be described as a person in closest personal relation to Christ.

If contemporary theologians are correct, the most significant New Testament metaphor for the church is the *body of Christ*.⁵³ Although this figure is found at various places in the New Testament (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:16; etc.), the fullest presentation is I Corinthians 12:12 ff. Paul says that we all were baptized into one body and all partake of the Spirit even though we were Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men. The church body is said to consist of many members. Each member is a part of the body even if it does not think so. Each member has a particular, indispensable function to perform. The body is in such harmonious unity that if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (12:26). Finally, Paul concludes, "Now you are the members of Christ and individually members of it" (12:27). Colossians (1:24) and Ephesians (1:22; 4:15; 5:23) add the idea of Christ as the head of the body. This figure stresses unity in the Spirit transcending racial and social bounds, a unity in diversity of function,⁵⁴ a unity of corporate personality,⁵⁵ a unity under the dynamic authority of the living Christ.

A summary of the implications of these metaphors presents a composite picture of the biblical concept of the church. The church is in a sense transcendent; it was created by God's act in Christ, it has an ideal holiness; its final form will be perceived only in the *eschaton*. The church is likewise immanent; God's act occurred in history, and the resulting church has continuity backward to the Old Testament people of God and forward through the apostles to successive generations. The church has a function in the world: to worship the transcendent God who created it and to witness to the Christ who sanctified it. Most of all, *the church is essentially a unity*.

53. The current trend toward literalizing this figure of speech (cf. Nelson, *The Redemption*, p. 67 ff.; Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, p. 55 ff.) seems somewhat overdone. Without doubt this is the most meaningful metaphor, but it still remains a metaphor among other metaphors.

54. Burrows, *Biblical Theology*, p. 149.

55. Johnston, *Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 92 f.

biblical metaphor considered makes this point. It involves a diversity of social background, racial heritage, geographical location, function, and undoubtedly, theological ideas; but in essence the church is one. This is so close that the church can be considered a corporate personality; a person can stand for the group: Jesus Christ, its Lord. He is the living unity of the ongoing church, he has given the Christians new life by giving himself, and this new life in him is their oneness.

Christianity aroused enthusiasm, because the true life of the individual was found to lie in the voluntary sacrifice of selfish interest within the community, and in complete allegiance to a beloved Leader, rather than to a theological system. At first its creed was the simplest; life mattered supremely.⁵⁶

The ideal for the church is well summarized by the author of Ephesians. "We are one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope which belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (4:4 ff.).⁵⁷ The plan for the church which has as its basic purpose an expression of this social unity of the church is by that very purpose founded solidly on the ideal doctrine of the church.

But why does the New Testament employ metaphors for the description of the church? Because the church is in a sense transcendent, so that no clear or objective description of it is adequate. Though ideally holy, the church even in the New Testament period is tainted by sin; though ideally one the church in its concrete earliest history shows trends toward division.⁵⁸ Johnston is correct when he writes, "Throughout the New Testament the church is a visible community *on earth*, dedicated to God for the extension of his Rule, ideally one and universal, but too often troubled by schism, doubt, and unbelief, and marred by the imperfection of its own inner life."⁵⁹ In its life, the church divided over the question of its relation to Judaism (cf. Gal. 2:11 ff.). No sooner had Paul left Corinth than embryonic denominations were born (I Cor. 1:11 ff.). Colossians, II Peter, Revelation, and the Johannine Epistles, in their refutation of certain here-

Johnston, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 33. Used by permission of the Cambridge University Press.

It is a travesty of exegesis to use this text as a defense of a particular credal faith or a mode of baptism. The intent is the opposite. Since there is an essential, ideal unity of the church which they have experienced in faith and baptism and which rests ultimately on the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3).

Cf. John Knox, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church* (New York: Abingdon, 1925), p. 20 ff.

Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 126. Speaking about the idea of the church he goes on to say, "No congregation of Paul's foundation nor any known church was tolerably near his ideal" (p. 101).

ance, give evidence of theological differences within the church. In words, when the church took on concrete form in history, its essential, unity was endangered.

Nevertheless, the church of the New Testament expressed a unity in history although it was obviously a unity in diversity.⁶⁰ There is a *koinonía* (Acts 2:42) underlying the outward differences. Apparent members moved freely from one local church to another; Phoebe was readily received by the church at Rome, or Ephesus, or whatever church the recipient of Romans 16. Ministers appear to have been mutually accepted by the church, for the apostles, prophets, and teachers of 1 Cor. 12:28 seem to have been officials for the universal church.⁶¹ There was apparently a unity beyond the local congregation, as the use of *ekke* for either the local or whole church indicates; representatives of more than one individual church participated in the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), the benevolent offering for the saints at Jerusalem was a concern of all of Paul's congregations. "The local community," says Flew, "was a cross-section of the whole church."⁶² Therefore, a kind of loose unity based upon the ideal of oneness in Christ actually existed in the life of the ancient church. Professor Burrows writes as follows:⁶³

As our study of the church indicates, there is nothing in the New Testament, that would require a single, united ecclesiastical organization. Unity of spirit is essential, but the degree and kind of union and the degree and kind of diversity desirable are, like all other questions of organization and method, matters to be determined only on the basis of effectiveness in promoting the purpose of the church.

If this conclusion is correct, the New Testament concept of the church actually calls for diversity within a flexible unity. This is why the New Testament offers no rigid theological creed, but presents merely confessions of faith (1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). This is why the New Testament knows no mechanical idea of ordination and the ministry but ranges all the way from the charismatic leaders of 1 Corinthians 12:28 ff. to the clerical officials of the Pastoral Epistles. This is why the New Testament demands no rigid doctrine of the meaning and mode of the sacraments, but moves all the way from the simple common meal of Acts 2:42 to the implied sa-

⁶⁰ Robinson, *The Biblical Foundations of the Church*, 136, probably goes a little too far when he says, "While among the churches there were no doubt differences of usage and custom, there was a fundamental unity in faith and sacraments as well as in ethical life."

⁶¹ Cf. Hans Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church* (trans. H. L. Woolf) (New York: Methuen, 1940), 142 ff.

⁶² Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, p. 18. Used by permission of Abingdon Press.

⁶³ Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, p. 133. Used by permission of the Westminster Press. Cf. Clarence Tucker Crogg, "The Church of the New Testament," *Exegetical*, XIII (1935) 1.

lism of I Corinthians 12:27 ff. The Old Testament presents a pattern for the tabernacle; the New Testament presents no blue print for the church.

Indeed, the problem of the divided church begins at this very point: the attempt to confine the church to *one* pattern. According to the New Testament, the church is immanent, yet transcendent; it must take form in history, but its transcendence ever and again breaks its historical forms to make new ones. The transcendence of the church also implies its essential unity which must gain some expression even in the diversity of its historically immanent church. How can this historic unity be achieved? The post-apostolic age attempted two methods: the way of the letter and the way of the spirit.⁶⁴ The way of the letter attempted to find unity through the centralization of ecclesiastical authority. The Elder of III John asserts his authority against Diotrophes, and the Pastoral Epistles list definite qualifications for the bishops and deacons in the church. A theological unity was sought in a move toward creedalism; Titus stresses the "sound doctrine" (2:1) and Jude urges contending "for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (v. 3). This way of the letter had its logical end in the three-fold development of canon, creed, and episcopacy of the second century. Exclusive attention to such a method finally resulted in the construction of the rigid system of the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages and its counterpart, the creedal, biblicist scholasticism of the nineteenth century Protestantism.

The way of the spirit is to be found in the Fourth Gospel.⁶⁵ One of the great themes of this post-apostolic work is its emphasis on the idea that the death and departure of Christ is actually a benefit for the church. It is a benefit because the going of Christ makes possible the coming of the Holy Spirit which will make the church one. The spiritual way to oneness is the way of love in response to Christ's love. "A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (13:34).⁶⁶ The spiritual way to unity is the way of personal commitment to Christ; he is the shepherd who must be followed (ch. 10); he is the vine in which the branches must abide (ch. 15).⁶⁷ The spiritual way is the way of unity through God's activity. The "prayer of Jesus" expresses this idea clearly. "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, even

⁶⁴ H. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 111 ff. for a history of the church in the sub-apostolic age.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126 ff.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁶⁷ F. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. K. Groedel (New York: 1955) II, 91 ff.

as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so the world may believe that Thou hast sent me" (17:20 f.). This prayer of the early church, composed when divisions were already appearing within the church as a result of the attempt to enforce unity exclusively by the word of the letter, is a prayer to God. He it is who is called upon to bring about the unity of his people, since human attempts are failing. God will bring about this unity by revealing the essential unity which Christians already have with Christ and hence with God. The expression of the unity in the world will be the further carrying out of God's act of love in Christ—the world might have faith in him, and thus, eternal life (cf. 3:16).⁶⁸

It is not the intention here to say that the way of the spirit is the exclusive way to unity. Actually both ways, that of the spirit and of the letter, held in mutual tension, compose the New Testament program for the unity of the church. The church must have form in the world; it requires organization, leaders, orders of worship, statements of faith. Yet none of these forms can be absolutized; the Spirit ever and again breaks the forms, creates new forms, and continually holds together in unity the people of Christ whose forms are diverse. It was the mutually corrective operation of these two principles which gave the church of the second century its high degree of unity;⁶⁹ canon, creed and episcopacy were of necessity developing, though they had not yet been crystallized and absolutized. Hence, a churchman like Ignatius, who advocated the monarchical episcopate, could also say, "Where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church."⁷⁰ This dual method points again to the two-fold nature of the church as transcendent and immanent. This paradoxical character of the church is further clarified by the New Testament idea of the relation of the church to the kingdom of God. Scholars are in the main agreed that the church and the kingdom are not identical. Rather, the kingdom means the kingly rule of God which is eternally and completely realized in the *eschaton* when God is all in all. Thus in its transcendent aspect the church may be identified with the kingdom of God.

68. Cf. Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, p. 94: "The world will be able to receive the truth of the Incarnation only if this unity is manifested."

69. Knox, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church*, p. 129, insists that the catholic movement of the second century "brought the church a larger measure of outward unity than it had had before or that it has had since." However, Knox's glorification of the second century is somewhat overdone. It is well to remember that our knowledge of the period is limited by the vigorous censorship of orthodoxy; but in spite of this, we know the second century to be the time of the beginning of major schism within the church. Cf. S. L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1953).

70. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, VIII, 2.

71. Cf. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 46 ff. Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, p. 23 ff. It must be acknowledged of course, that Matthew almost makes identification.

leally and essentially God reigns over it; yet in its immanent sense, it is subjected to the rule of men, for God is only partially its Lord. The hope of Christians, however, is that the kingdom shall come, that God will graciously act to make the church and His kingdom one.

We have seen, therefore, that historical, contemporary, and biblical theology all agree in regard to one central aspect of the doctrine of the church: *it's essential unity*. This unity is based on an idea of Christ; not a compendium of his teachings, but Christ as the final revelation of God. Although he came in the flesh, he cannot be reduced to creedal formulas. Indeed, no person can be known through objective description; certainly God's personal revelation of himself cannot be limited to human categories. We cannot wrap our little minds around God so as to possess him; he has revealed his love in the death of Jesus so as to possess us. Paul begins to say, "Now that you have come to know God," then suddenly catches himself, "or rather to be known by God" (Gal. 4:9). We know God as he makes himself known in Christ, and the way of perceiving this personal revelation is by personal commitment, New Testament terminology, faith.

Man never receives this revelation in isolation; Christ is always mediated to him through the church, and his response in faith makes him a part of that community. The Christian is brought into fellowship with Christ thereby with all those who call him Lord. Thus the church is created by God's act in Christ and man's response in faith. Like Christ, whose church the church metaphorically is, the church has a dual nature; it is divine and human, transcendent, yet immanent in history. In its transcendent aspect, the church is eternal, holy, one; it cannot be limited to any human categories. In its immanent aspect, the church is involved in the relativities of history; it must express the diversities of faithful response to Christ. The transcendence of the church implies its essential unity—a unity transcending all human forms. The immanence of the church implies the diversity of the church—a diversity which cannot violate the church's essential unity or its continuity in history. The problem for those who seek the visible expression of the essential unity of the church is to find some forms or forms which allow for the church's diversity while still witnessing unity in Christ.⁷²

THE GREENWICH PLAN

One attempt to give outward expression to the church's essential unity is the Greenwich Plan, or more accurately, the *Plan of Union for a United*

Cf. Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, p. 205 ff.

Church. The basic presuppositions of this program of unity have clearly stated:⁷³

1. We are grieved that the members of all our churches are Christians, equally accepted by Christ as members of His church.
2. All our denominations are by intention, conviction and in fact equally Christian churches.
3. All our denominations share equally in the sin of maintaining schismatic churches.
4. Our way of thinking about the Christian faith has undergone profound changes in the past half-century.
5. The doctrinal differences which formerly existed between the denominations are now embraced in the denominations themselves.
6. Our denominations are now beginning to see that their differences, such as they are, can be more hopefully reconciled within a united church than in sectarian isolation.
7. The association of our denominations in national and community federations has led them into a mode of cooperation which is, in principle, organic.

These presuppositions recognize the essential, transcendent unity of church: all Christians are members of Christ's church (1), schismatic denominations are sinful (3), the denominations are beginning to recognize their essential unity (2, 4, 7). These presuppositions also are aware that any visible, immanent expression of that unity will involve a unity in diversity: doctrinal differences can exist with a united church (5, 6). Moreover, the outward expression must remain flexible and continue developing: differences may best be reconciled within the united church (7). Before listing these seven points, Morrison, speaking about the plan's basic approach of unity in diversity says, "This faith is ultimately derived from Christ the Head of the Church."⁷⁴ Therefore, the Greenwich Plan rests on three basic theological principles: (1) the essential unity of the church; (2) the unity in diversity of the visible church; (3) the basis for the unity of the church in Christ.⁷⁵ Or, to employ the technical terminology of the above discussion, the church is both transcendent and immanent; it has its unity in Christ who is both divine and human. How adequately does the actual wording of the plan live up to these theologically and biblically valid presuppositions?

73. Morrison, "Protestantism is Ready" *op. cit.*, p. 4 ff.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

75. Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 199: "Our present thesis is that the structure of the united church can have no formal standards of loyalty save the authority inherent in the Lordship of Christ, and that the entire subject matter of the sectarian standards must be given place in the freedom of its fellowship."

In regard to matters concerning the immanence of the church, the Greenwich Plan is generally on solid ground. The approach to the problem is clearly that of unity in diversity.

The fundamental problem which it seeks to solve is that of bringing into one body three types of churches which . . . are accustomed to operate under somewhat different forms of organization. . . . Previous plans for union have largely attempted to merge these polities by compromising or eliminating their differences. The distinctive characteristic of the present plan is that the essential features of these polities are preserved and maintained simultaneously within the one church (p. 5. 2:44 f.).

Here Morrison explains the principle involved by saying, "It is not a reasonable expectation that, in the united church, provision may be made for what may be called a 'mixed polity' with respect to certain functions of the local church."⁷⁶ Thus, diversity is an essential characteristic of the united church, and here the plan is in agreement with historical, contemporary, and biblical concepts of the church.⁷⁷

However, some slight lack of clarity in regard to this matter appears in the plan. For instance in Section VI, "Toward a More Perfect Union," an admirable statement of the diversity of the church is made. (p. 14) we read, "We believe, however, that the fullest measure of ecumenical union presupposes an ever-widening degree of common polity, common forms and materials of worship, and common ways of thought." It seems to say that the purpose of unity in diversity is to bring about an equal uniformity, *even in theological matters*. This would be a violation of the historical-biblical doctrine of the *essential diversity* of the immanent church. Practically it might lead to schism within the church and it would only close the door to unity with groups not participating in the Greenwich Plan or sharing the new-found uniformity. The plan is on much better theological ground when it speaks of going "beyond any of those traditions" to develop new traditions of worship and polity" (p. 14. 11:38 f.).

The idea of uniting denominations of different polities also witnesses to the essential diversity of the historical church. Horton, speaking about the three main theological ideas of the church (catholic, classic protestant, congregational) says that, "Only an organization, or a series of cooperating organizations, which make room for the values in all three types"⁷⁸ would be valid for the ecumenical church. Students of the Greenwich Plan, however, need to be aware that the three types mentioned in the plan

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁷⁷ Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 95: "Above all, the church is one. It is a unity in diversity, the union of unnumbered varieties, so that in it are contained the highest personal values—life, freedom, peace, justice, brotherly love."

⁷⁸ Horton, *Christian Theology*, p. 243.

(congregational, episcopal, presbyterian)⁷⁹ are not identical with historical-theological divisions of Horton. The Presbyterian "churches" represent a type of classical protestant church, but the Methodists do not adequately express the catholic idea of the church. Bishops of the Methodist denomination do not stand in apostolic succession; they do not historically even rest upon "valid" episcopal ordination. Hence the plan appears to claim too much when it says that it involves "churches" of episcopal polity. It is at least inaccurate when it states that the plan "embodies the three historic polities of Protestantism" (p. 6, l. 6).

If the plan is truly to express the biblical-historical idea of the church in unity in diversity, it will also avoid limiting its participants to these three types of polity. Other forms are possible; new developments should be allowed and perhaps encouraged. The suggestion of the Disciples' study group of October, 1955 is, therefore, well taken. They urge the addition of the following paragraph to the section on the "classification" of the local church (p. 8. 6:13):

Variations and combinations of these three historic polities may be worked out by congregations in consultation with the presbytery, the bishop, and the conference. In such cases, the congregations involved may be classified as related to any, to all, or to none of the three other categories.

Their suggestion of greater flexibility in the movement of ministers is especially of value. There is likewise certain value in this group's view that the "Covenant of Union" ought to provide for the individual members as well as the ecclesiastical bodies. However, this idea of a pledge of fellowship by individuals within the denominations must not be taken to imply a radical individualism which would violate the corporate personality of the church. It would be just as dangerous to crystallize upon a rigid idea of human freedom as upon a particular type of polity.

Actually, this Plan for a unity in diversity is at some points even more rigid than its authors suppose. The statement that the program of union involves "bringing into one body three types of churches which already recognize one another's ministries and sacraments" is incorrect. "Closely knit membership" Disciples do not recognize fully any baptism except immersion for adult believers. The plan is flexible enough to allow for even this sectarian position. Such flexibility ought to be maintained, so that the statement that "we look forward to the time when all letters of transfer will be freely received" (p. 9. 6:26-27) should be stricken, as the Disciples

79. The suggestion of a study conference of Disciples of Christ, meeting in October, 1956 (embodied in a letter to the conference on Church Union, February 7, 1956) that the term "presbyterian" ought to be changed to "presbyterial" seems valid.

group suggests. However, their suggestion that all new members of united church should be "received by baptism on the confession of faith in Jesus Christ" also partakes of the same desire to crystallize the requirement for membership—a desire which if followed would tend to disrupt the principle of unity in diversity.⁸⁰

The Greenwich Plan similarly witnesses to the immanence of the church by its clear insistence that the Plan itself is not a final, authoritative constitution for the church. "We make no claim to finality or perfection in our concept of such a Church as is here set forth. We submit it in all humility to the several Churches for their prayerful consideration, study, criticism, and suggestions" (p. 14. 11:56 ff.).⁸¹ The provision for a study commission within the ongoing life of the united church is likewise commendable (p. 14. 11:41), as is the suggestion that "both official and informal groups will formulate [not crystallize] their opinions" about the Plan (p. 5. 3:18). "The true church," writes Robinson, "is always the church courageously facing the future, refusing to be satisfied with the status quo, dynamic in her life and in her influence; and she dares to face the future so courageously because she is *so deeply rooted in the past*."⁸² Indeed, the unity of the church is not an end in itself, but a means of accomplishing the purpose of God's action in the past in Christ—the salvation of the world. We work and pray that we might be one, so that the world might believe (John 17:21). Therefore, the Greenwich Plan, with its minor revisions, expresses the immanence of the church—a church which lives in history expressing itself in a diversity of relatively valuable beliefs and practices.

In regard to the transcendence of the church, the Greenwich Plan is somewhat less adequate. True enough, there is some recognition of the church's essential unity. "We have long known that in essentials of faith we are already one" (p. 6. 3:37). Unfortunately, this statement only witnesses to a growing unity among the "churches" in regard to their doctrines; it does not really witness to the essential unity of the church—a unity which exists apart from our growing recognition of it. All members are a part of the church even if they do not know it, "for the church does not consist of one member but of many" (I Cor. 12:14). The Plan more adequately witnesses to the divine, transcendent character of the church when it states, "The Universal Church is the fellowship which God

80. For a discussion of the varied concepts of the membership of the church (a variety which the Greenwich Plan should seek to maintain) cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 168, ff.

81. Cf. p. 5, 2:42 ff.

82. Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*, p. 137.

creates by His Holy Spirit through those who experience His grace in Christ" (p. 8. 5:22 f. cf. p. 3, l. 44).

The section on "The Divine Imperative" (p. 5. 3), by title, expresses the transcendence of the church; in its actual wording it sometimes seems to be ambiguous. Thus when the plan speaks of the "initiative and response of God" (p. 5. 3:32), we are reminded of the biblical belief that ultimately it is God who is making us one. Similar is the statement "through our common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we are one body in him" (p. 6. 3:44 f.). However, when the plan reads, "To Christians confront a world situation which demands that the churches make common cause" (p. 6. 3:50 f.), we become conscious of a shift upon a human, temporal imperative. It is quite possible that the present world situation may emphasize the relevance of the divine imperative, but to confuse the human and the divine is a sort of idolatry, as well as extremely poor theologizing.

In spite of the occasional statements about "the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit" (p. 14. 11:54 f.), one gets the feeling that the divine activity in this program of unity is a bit underemphasized. An example of this is the use of the "prayer of Jesus" (p. 7. 4:46 ff.). Not only is this a serious exegetical question as to whether this prayer actually came from the lips of Jesus, it is even more a question as to the use of the prayer in this context. The prayer, whether spoken by the historical Jesus or by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of the church, is addressed to God; he it is who is called upon to unite the church. The notion that this text primarily calls upon men to engage busily in little schemes for uniting eight or nine denominations is a gross usurping of the divine prerogative. Johnston is correct when he says, "Church unity is not man-made by concordat or effort, but created of necessity by the Spirit that is in Christ."⁸³ Of course, this needed emphasis on the activity of God in any program of unity should not be taken as an extreme "neo-orthodox" idea that man can do nothing. To do nothing about the unity of the church, is in effect, to do something, probably something highly detrimental. The intention here, is simply to suggest that all our activity should attempt to order itself to conform to the divine activity. We must work out our own plan of unity, for it is God who is working in us.

Further evidence for a lack of clarity in regard to the transcendence of the church is the use of certain terms for the church within the plan. For example, the word "Church" (capitalized) is used in the document for denominations (cf. pp. 5, 7, 14. 3:31; 5:11 f.; 11:59). It can also be

83. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 100.

ed for the Universal Church (p. 8. 5:22), the ecumenical Church (p. 8.), or the local Church (p. 8. 5:24 ff.). In the biblical sense of the , the term "church" can rightly be used only for the local or the uni- l (or ecumenical) church; it is a serious question whether denomina- can rightfully be called "churches."⁸⁴ Perhaps the plan could place usage in quotation marks or at least delete the capital letter.

More serious is the tendency in the plan to equate "The United Church rist" which it proposes with the universal church (cf. p. 8. 5:22 ff.). statement that the United Church of Christ is "catholic and inclusive in ose and form" is an exaggeration; the purpose of the plan is to unite denominations, and its form is likewise limited. Even a church which dies 16 million Protestant Americans is not identical with the universal h. To equate the product of the Greenwich Plan with the universal h is a serious violation of the principle of the transcendent church; an ation which participates in the relativities of history and has as its itueny only a fraction of Christendom is not the universal church. The ple suggestion that capital "T" ought to be removed from the title "United Church" might improve this anomaly a little. It is possible, of e, that the Greenwich Plan may contribute to the formation of an ization which will give some relatively valid expression of the trans- nt unity of the church; and it is likely that "churches" which are ex- d from the United Church will be so by their own volition—a volition pted by a failure to acknowledge the transcendence of the church due ne attempt to absolutize certain of its immanent aspects. Nevertheless, oduction of the plan will be at best a visible expression in history of ascendent, universal church.

Many biblical theologians will be perplexed by the plan's use of the "kingdom." Although scholarship has reached no universally accepted nsus about this complex biblical idea, it is generally agreed that two on usages are incorrect: the idea that the kingdom of God is identical the church, and the notion that the kingdom is a utopian society on ⁸⁵ The Greenwich Plan seems to have no clear-cut doctrine of the om, and this is as it should be. However, its statements sometimes l as if it adheres to either one or the other of the incorrect usages. it says that we are one in our belief "in the Holy Catholic Church, gh which God's eternal purpose of salvation is proclaimed and his dom comes on earth" (p. 7. 4:38 f.), we might conclude that the h is an instrument for the bringing in of a Christian social order—the om of God. Of course, the authors may have intended to indicate

. Cf. Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 48 ff.

. Cf. Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, p. 23 ff.

that the church in proclaiming God's salvation is his means of establishing his eschatological reign. Although this is more nearly a biblical concept, some still might object that the sovereign God is made much too dependent upon the action of the historical church. More objectionable is the statement (p. 12. 9:34) that a function of the Conference is "to promote the edification of the church and the extension of the kingdom of God." It is difficult to avoid the impression that the church is identified with the kingdom. As we have seen, only in its transcendent, eternal aspect can the church in any sense be equated with the kingdom. We may extend the permanent church; only God can add to his kingdom. Similarly objectionable is the assertion that a function of the General Council is the "promotion of the common interests of the Church and the kingdom of God" (p. 9:52).⁸⁶ Perhaps the authors did not intend to identify the church and the kingdom, but the notion that we can *promote* the kingdom is without scriptural, biblical or theological basis. Whatever the kingdom is, it is certainly not an American business corporation. This seeming confusion about the church and kingdom and its possible identification with the historical church or the social order is evidence of the failure to acknowledge adequately the transcendent aspect of the church. Unfortunately, the identification of church and kingdom does not raise the church up to its true transcendence but brings the kingdom down to the church's immanence.

In spite of these weaknesses, the Greenwich Plan has features which truly emphasize the church's essential transcendence. Important among these is the stress on the historical continuity of the church. "We are united in the common faith of the Christian Church and in our desire to share a common heritage the various historic and treasured expressions of that faith" (p. 7. 5:30 ff.). The provisions for the Episcopate (p. 9. 7) repeat the same emphasis. The bishop, who does not participate in a rigid apostolic succession, does symbolize an authority which goes beyond the historical church—an authority which has the sanction of both tradition and Scripture.⁸⁷ Critics who insist that such an office is without biblical basis should be reminded that in the post-apostolic church at least three types of minister were named: deacon (I Tim. 3:8 ff.), presbyter (I Tim. 5:17 ff.), and bishop (I Tim. 3:1 ff.). Advocates of the episcopate, however, should not reach conclusions too quickly, since there is some indication that in the early church the elder and the bishop were the same (cf. Titus 1:5 ff.; Phil. 1:1). Nevertheless, the existence of a separate order for the bishop as evidence

86. Why is there a capital for "Church" and none for "kingdom"?

87. Cf. Knox, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church*, p. 142 ff. However, he goes too far when he says, "I cannot conceive of the union of Christendom except on the ground of a polity which . . . involves the full acceptance of the historic episcopate" (p. 142).

Clement (c. A. D. 95) is proof of its early origin. It is also highly probable that the "elder" of II and III John exercised more than a mere local authority. William Robinson, a Disciple, says, "Protestantism does need to recover the sense of the apostolicity of the church and of the reality of apostolic authority in the primitive church."⁸⁸ It is possible that the provision for the episcopate may help to alleviate this need.

The Greenwich Plan, of course, must take safeguards against the possibility that this symbol of the church's transcendence might be crystallized into a rigid, immanent pattern. The bishop is merely "an ordained minister with a function beyond the local church; he does not represent a higher order of the clergy. The bishop is consecrated to his office rather than receiving a special ordination. His consecration should not, therefore, be for life" except in the sense that any minister is ordained for life. It should be made clear in the plan, that his consecration "by the imposition of hands of at least one other bishop" (p. 10. 7:37 f.) does not imply apostolic succession, but witnesses to the historic continuity of the church by a loosely conceived idea of "episcopal" consecration. This continuity indicates that although the church participates in the relativities of history, it has an ongoing life which transcends its own historic forms and structures. To insist that the church cannot have bishops would be to crystallize negatively the church's ministry. Actually the ministry should be left flexible; in the early days the Spirit selected a variety of ministers (cf. I Cor. 12:4 ff.; 12:28 ff.; Rom. 12:6 ff.), and perhaps the need of tomorrow's church will be for new servants to perform new functions.

Another commendable feature of the plan is its idea of a unity of the church beyond the local congregation. Provision for Presbytery, Conference, and General Council gives expression to this valid theological and ecclesial concept. The Disciple suggestion (page 20, above) of a sub-paragraph for the section entitled, "Union in the local community" (p. 13. 5:45-62) is, therefore, of much merit: "In the United Church of Christ, all local churches seek to manifest the wholeness of Christ in every particular community. They are, therefore, committed to one another, sharing their gifts, their planning, and their concern." Similarly the idea of participation "to the ministry of the Church Universal" (p. 9. 6:45 f.) validly witnesses to the larger unity. The Disciple suggestion that the bishop ordinarily participates and ordinarily presides (page 21, above) avoids the mechanical doctrine of apostolic succession or episcopal ordination while

still acknowledging the church's essential continuity.⁸⁰ Indeed, some emphasis on the freedom of the local church (pp. 8 ff. 5:25 f.; 6:16) seems to distract from this essential continuity and unity of the church.

Therefore, the Greenwich Plan, although not always clear in its understanding of the transcendence of the church, does not leave this essential aspect of the church without witness; it does stress the historical continuity and ecumenical unity of the church. The greatest weakness of the plan appears to be its failure to articulate clearly the theological basis for unity of the transcendent-immanent church: God's personal revelation of his love in Jesus Christ. It is true that the plan does mention that, "Through our common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we are made one in Him" (p. 6. 3:44). Such statements, however, are not given their necessary predominance in the plan. There is lacking the clarity and force of Amsterdam's declaration: "We have been drawn together to discover that notwithstanding our divisions, we are one in Jesus Christ."⁹¹

The most glaring example of this weakness is to be found in the section entitled *The Common Faith* (p. 7. 4). Nowhere does this theological statement of belief mention the truly biblical idea of faith—faith as personal commitment to God's dynamic revelation in Christ. Instead the section begins with a stress on our common historical tradition and then proceeds to a statement of "faith" which is thoroughly creedal in form. The only mention of Christ consists of doctrinal statements about him: he is God's Son and our Savior. Thus the New Testament idea of faith is replaced by the scholastic concept of intellectual assent to doctrines. It may be that some such expression of common belief is of liturgical value, but if the use of the "creed" in worship is its purpose, then this should be clearly stated in the plan. One thing, however, is theologically indubitable: no sort of statement of belief *is* not and *cannot* be the common faith upon which the united church is built; such creeds have always been a cause of division within the church. Hence the Disciple suggestion (page 19, above) that the title of the section be changed to "A Testimony to Our Unity" would make for improvement. Morrison more adequately senses the trend in contemporary theology when he writes, "The realm hitherto monopolized by creeds is coming under the authority of Christ, and the subject matter of

89. Some will undoubtedly insist that the plan holds too high a concept of the clergy. However, the Disciple insistence on the importance of *lay representation* in contrast to the minister indicates that the congregational type churches in feeling and practice have largely abandoned the idea that the minister is just another layman with special function.

90. The use of the term "sacraments," although objectionable to some, also witnesses to the importance of tradition and thus of historic continuity.

91. *The Universal Church in God's Design* (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), *Amsterdam Assembly Series*, I, 204.

s, stripped of their authority, are finding their true place in the free-
of the Christian fellowship."⁹²

Actually the plan does need a clear statement of the "non-doctrinal,"
nic idea of Christ which we have found emphasized in biblical and
emporary theology. Christ is the living Lord of the church and the
adequate authority for plans of union. The apostles hold their author-
ly as they witness to him; the New Testament gains its authority as
hfully preserves the experience of those who called him Christ and
the tradition of the church derives its authority from its continuous
mation of the Word which is Christ. Albert Outler presents these
with vigor and clarity.⁹³

The Christian tradition is Jesus Christ: witnessed and proclaimed by
ne power of the Holy Spirit; confessed as Lord and Savior to the glory
f God the Father; heard and obeyed as the Word of God; the Head of
ne Church, in which faithful men are truly members one of another. The
authority of the New Testament derives from its definitive witness to this
radition of the Word of God, and its power to transmit this Word to men
undiminished power and relevance. The authority of Christian preach-
g depends upon its faithfulness in representing this tradition in all its
allness and truth.

is the source of the unity of the church; He brings it into a unity
ntimate and comprehensive than ecumenical planners have conceived,
s his body, a corporate personality.

his theological analysis has any validity, the Greenwich Plan pre-
very hopeful program for the unity of the church. Theologically,
length of the plan rests with its recognition and attempted expression
essential unity of the church. The plan is also strong in its conviction
y historical expression of that unity will involve a diversity. Al-
the church is immanent, no one historical form or pattern of the
can be adequate. There are, as we have seen, some points where
inciple of an immanence that does not violate transcendence needs
ation. The plan is weaker in its understanding of the transcendent
er of the church—its essential unity and divine character always
tension with its diversity and humanity. There is within the plan,
r, much valid emphasis on the historical continuity and unity beyond
al church. Most needed is a clear statement and adequate emphasis
theological basis for unity in God's revelation in Christ.

ne theological analysis given here is at best a modest beginning. It
d that more capable hands will join in the undertaking. Many of

Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 194.

Albert C. Outler, "The Church Unity We Have," *The Christian Century* (June 13, 1956)

721. Cf. Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 158.

the theological implications of the plan have been left untouched, and considered here have been handled only briefly, and perhaps, superficially. However, one conclusion seems unavoidable: The Greenwich Plan, any other proposal for the unity of the church, rests on theological suppositions and contains theological concepts. This is not only inevitable, it is desirable. A plan for the unity of the church should be based on sound theological concepts, and ultimately upon a theology of the church. Such a theology will not be the divisive, creedal, dogmatic theology of medieval and Protestant scholasticism. It will be the unifying, dynamic theology of commitment to the living Christ. This theology can never be absolutely and finally expressed either doctrinally or ecclesiastically. It will be an expression of the living faith of those who confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord," and who recognize that they make this confession only by the Spirit which has made them one.

Implications for Local Churches

By

W. J. JARMAN

WHAT will the proposed Plan for a United Church in the United States mean to a local congregation of the Disciples of Christ?

It might be argued that it will mean very little. In terms of the actual work of an average local congregation there will be almost no change. This is most easily seen if we examine the work of the church in terms of the usual functional committees, and inquire what each would have to do differently than before such a United Church.

The worship department will not find its work changed in any way. The Plan specifically provides that each local church shall determine its mode of worship and of administering baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The department of membership development will continue to have the same basic problems: integration of new members, reactivation of inactive members, the encouragement of attendance, participation, and loyalty of the congregation. The department of evangelism, also, would have the same basic task of winning new converts, and reclaiming the church member who has moved to the community. So also with the departments of property, Christian stewardship, education, Christian action and community service, the basic tasks would not be changed.

The one functional committee which would find its work different is the department of world outreach. Under the proposed Plan, the work beyond the local congregation would be re-organized. Work within a geographical area is to be the responsibility of a presbytery or conference. Work on a national and international level is to be the responsibility of the General Council. All of the various national agencies of the several churches will be united and the work administered and co-ordinated through the General Council. Thus the work of the department of missions in a local church will be determined by the total program of the United Church, and since this program will be far greater than what we do now, and surely greater than what all of the several constituting churches together are doing now, the problem of missionary and outreach education will be of even greater and more staggering proportions than it is now.

Here, however, we may begin to see one of the effects which will certainly follow in the local church. The materials used will come through the new agencies created to integrate the missionary and educational enterprises of the United Church and under the direction of the General Council. Undoubtedly this will provide a rich variety of material available to the local church. It is absurd to fear that only one choice of materials will be available so that the local church would be forced into a prescribed pattern. Instead, the savings and economies of mass production will make it possible to produce better materials. Already we have taken large steps in this direction through the use of common curriculums, common vacation church school texts, common promotional materials in stewardship, common missionary educational books and literature. If this is to our advantage now, with separate programs but common causes, think how much more it will mean when we have a common enterprise as well.

If we examine the effect of this Plan upon the local church through the eyes of a pastor, again, at a casual inspection we shall not find much changed. Most of a pastor's time will still be spent in the routines of preaching, administration, pastoral care, the conduct of worship, education, and promotion. However, he will have at least one more meeting to attend, the meeting of the presbytery of which he is a member. For he cannot be a pastor of a church unless he is a member of the presbytery. As a member of this presbytery he will have some responsibilities, and in almost certain probability serve on a committee or committees of the presbytery which administers and promotes matters of concern to the churches within a small local area. There is a possibility, also, that the pastor may be a delegate to the conference, either through election by the presbytery, or, in conferences which choose to do so, because every pastor is a member of the conference. If he is a delegate to the conference, he will meet at least once a year, and have the duty of joining in the selection of a nominee for bishop. Again, if a delegate to the conference, there is the likelihood of serving on conference committees (which, for former Disciples, would be akin to serving on State Convention or State Society committees). If he is a delegate to the conference, he will also participate in the selection of delegates to the General Council, and may be elected as one himself.

While all of this seems to be happening to a pastor instead of a church, it also has a very direct influence on the life of the local church, just the same as it does now when the minister serves on boards and committees outside of his local congregation. It is one

the principle ways in which a local church is in fact related to churches beyond itself.

There are other important ways in which the adoption of the plan as proposed would, or could, make changes in a local congregation. As proposed, if a local church wanted to change from a purely congregational form of government to either a presbyterial or an episcopal form, it would have the option to do so, after announcing its intention two years in advance. It seems doubtful that many churches could do this at the beginning of such a United Church, but it is a possibility which in time might become actual. It also needs to be pointed out that there are probably congregations now under presbyterial or episcopal government which might elect to become congregational in form.

The most far reaching change for Disciple congregations would come in respect to the ministry. No longer could a congregation ordain a man just because it seemed a good idea to someone at the time, without regard to qualifications, education, or character. The present anarchy would be put down. Ordination would be by the presbytery on the recommendation of the local church of which the candidate is a member, and the examining committee of the presbytery. Without both recommendations, ordination could not be given. The present scandal of ordination of men who are sometimes poorly educated, and, let it be admitted honestly, also sometimes morally and spiritually unfit for the ministry, will to a considerable degree be abated.

There are two important provisions in the Plan which champions of congregational independence should keep in mind. First, the synod is related to churches and ministers in the congregational category only in the capacity of an advisor. Secondly, there is provided an Appeal Agency which can hear and determine on complaints from individual members or churches. If, for example, a local congregation should nominate a man for ordination and the presbytery refuse to ordain, the congregation could appeal to this Agency if it believed that ordination was withheld unjustly or from prejudice. Or suppose that there is only one congregation in a large presbytery in which all other churches are of an episcopal or presbyterial order, and this congregation were treated unfairly and pressured to change its form of government, or in some other way discriminated against. It could appeal its cause to this Agency. While the rules and procedures of the Appeal Agency are not spelled out in the present proposal, it nevertheless establishes a principle of protection for the rights of all parts of the United Church.

And yet, when all of these details have been spelled out and the organization outlined and rules codified, the most important change which this Proposed Plan would make in the local church has not been stated. The profound influence would be from a change of spiritual climate. The work of the local church would be within a new context and a new perspective. Some of the wounds of the broken body of Christ would at least be healed. There would be the knowledge that large bodies of Christians have taken Christ seriously enough to find that what they share in common in Him is infinitely more precious than anything which may divide, and that the unity of the Church, His agent of will and work, is not a shadowy fancy of the pious but is a brain and brawn reality. The adoption of the Plan is an adventure of discovery into what can be done for Jesus Christ when we let the Great Church become more actual and dominant in our life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

By

JOHN E. McCaw

THE seminaries of most of the churches who have been actively engaged in discussing the Greenwich plan are already engaged in experiences which have ecumenical content. With some exceptions, most of the seminaries have others than their own church members within the student body. Many will have from ten to twenty different denominations represented in the enrollment. Likewise the culty of these seminaries is increasingly becoming interdenominational. Faculty affiliation does not always adequately describe faculty beliefs. Within seminaries, schools of thought cut across denominational affiliation. About half of the accredited seminaries in the United States of America are related to the Greenwich communions.

The student body, being interdenominational in many cases, has so been stimulated by its relationships to the Inter-Seminary Movement. This movement has through the years helped to build the ecumenical complexion of seminary education. In fact, active participation of preministerial students in the Student Christian Movement and then active participation in the Inter-Seminary Movement, has perhaps done more to bring in the day of ecumenical concern than anything derived from union efforts on the part of particular churches or from organizational plans for such union. The spirit of understanding, cooperation, and trust came between persons who came to know each other as Christian friends before it came into expression in organizational form. It is perhaps true to say that any genuine union or deep expression of ecumenical endeavor will have to come through channels of personal relationship and personal trust, as well as conversation and discussion if it is to be real and effective. This is to say that the seminary may be the genuine cradle for development of union movements, for in many ways, as goes the ministry so goes the church.

Having said this, however, there are two areas where real problems must be faced. The first area is in the realm of mechanics and the second area in the realm of ideology. In the first area there are many questions which come to mind. For instance, seminary education must be expanded but would not such expansion need to be developed in an ecumenical setting or a union setting with reference to existing seminaries? What would be the relationship of existing

seminaries to their present denominations and to an overall union church expression? Would each seminary maintain its historical affiliation, or would it be loosed from that affiliation and be related to an overall entity? If new seminaries were established, who would establish them? What would be the relationship of seminaries to particular conferences? What about the control of present seminaries, particularly those that are controlled by the boards of large nonsectarian universities? The problems of spacing seminaries, the control of seminaries, and the support of ministerial education would need to be thoroughly spelled out. There might need to be adjustment in terms of faculty so that the faculty increasingly reflected the cross-section of the new united church.

Another problem is in the area of mechanics of curriculum. How is a minister to be trained? Is he to be trained in the history of one particular group or in the history of all? Is he to be trained as a minister for every church or for one particular church body with the right of moving from one body to the other? How is polity to be taught? Many of these questions have been raised by the Carnegie Study under the direction of the American Association of Theological Schools led by Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Williams. They become really pertinent in a union venture.

These mechanics can be worked out over a period of time. The overall question is will new members come out as the old, Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples, etc., or will they come out "Greenwiched."? However, it is in the area of ideology that the big problem will be encountered.

These are problems for seminary education *per se* and would have to do with the training of the minister for any one of the denominations involved in the Greenwich Plan and would be probably magnified by union. The problems of ideology have to do with the rights of the minister as an individual and the demands of a denomination or a group of denominations on him as a representative of the church. The administration of a seminary faces the problem, "Shall a student go his way willy-nilly to develop as he sees fit, or is he to be bound over to the church, responsible to what the church has to demand of him." Very quickly the united church on the Greenwich Plan would have to face up to discussions as to what is the ministry, what is the responsibility of the individual minister to the overall continuum of Christianity, and where does he have license to be a man free in his opinions and beliefs.

What is orthodoxy? What is the concept of the church that is to be maintained? Within present-day seminaries there are those who believe that the church is not in itself Divine, but rather a sociological entity, a human institution. There are those who think of the church as a free association of individuals under God. There are others who think of the church as a Divinely ordained institution under God with specific directions for procedure and caretaking. The points of view within seminaries and among seminaries range from extremely liberal concepts viewing Jesus as a human being, to orthodox Christian concepts involving the virgin birth, literal views on scripture, and supernatural definitions of the person and work of God. There are those who have a creedal basis and a catechetical procedure for maintaining a type of uniformity, and others who have proceeded on an approach to scripture which does not necessarily maintain uniformity. Depending upon one's theological undergirding is one's understanding of the role of liturgy in church services. This involves the selection of hymnals as well as the type of prayers. Depending upon one's theological understanding is one's understanding of church membership, as well as the roles of minister and layman.

The seminary must teach something. Perhaps it will need to teach all things to all men in order that all may be satisfied. However, it is doubtful that an individual minister can have much character unless he begins to sift into logical pattern of his own beliefs and the implication of these beliefs within the life and practice of the church he serves. If such free-wheeling education is allowed then there is bound to be difficulty with the ordination committees of presbyteries. The only possible solution perhaps will be that there shall be such close association and fellowship between the church and its present ministry, and the faculty and student bodies of seminaries that a common understanding will develop which will not be extremely permissive and restrictive but at the same time not allow for such diversities as to bring about the education of a ministry unfitted for the church. This will also mean more theological consideration for those who have been dependent upon just the Bible and more Biblical concentration for those who have been more dependent upon theological speculations.

A practical suggestion which might well precede any implementation of the Greenwich Plan would be:

First, that the seminaries of the communions presently involved take the lead, within their own communions, to develop self-consciousness, reinvestigating the history and ideology of their par-

ticular branches of the Church so that they might really know what they are bringing to the union. Most problems in union are not with the other communions, but failure to understand one's own communion adequately.

The next step would be discussion and exchange of faculty between seminaries of various communions so that a responsible exchange of history and theological background could be brought to bear.

The third step would be an analysis of the common truths and concerns in the form of special articles and books to provide a basis for the development of an interseminary cultus from which church-wide discussion could emerge and constructive mechanics be developed for presentation to the total body of the communions. Union may be possible now only because much of the membership and many of the ministers are not certain what they believe. But union will eventually be possible when most of the membership and most of the ministers see so much of belief and practice in common they cannot remain apart before a world of sin and war.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DENOMINATIONAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAM

By

SPENCER P. AUSTIN

RELATIVELY little is said specifically in the current draft of the Greenwich Plan of Union about agencies and boards which might be created for the United Church of Christ. Nothing is said about extant agencies and boards of communions expected to merge in the union. In the section on "Functions" of the General Council it is stated that one of its functions is "to consult upon and devise measures and maintain agencies for the promotion of the common interests of the Church and the kingdom of God." Since the General Council normally meets biennially an executive commission of thirty-four is provided for, to be "the administrative agency of The United Church of Christ. It is composed of eight bishops, . . . ten ministers and ten laymen, two women elected by the Women's Society of the United Church of Christ, and four members elected by the Council of Secretaries of the General Boards."

This would imply the establishment of agencies and boards of an official character created by and answerable to the General Council through its executive commission "to do and promote the work of the whole Church in its national, international, and ecumenical relations."

Some of the numerous agencies, commissions, and boards projected in the United Church of Christ is indicated in the section on responsibilities of the General Council which reads as follows:

"The General Council is responsible for coordinating and administering the general enterprise of The United Church of Christ as a whole, including evangelism, missions at home and abroad, ecumenical activity, Christian education, ministerial education, stewardship, publishing, ministerial pensions, social action; and to these ends, it creates such corporations and appoints such boards, commissions, committees and officers as may be needful. It recognizes and fosters organizations of men, women and youth within the membership of The United Church of Christ. The responsibilities of the General Council are discharged on behalf of the constituent local churches, Presbyteries, and Conferences."

The above would seem to indicate that initiative in administrative affairs is almost exclusively at the national level. Boards and agencies would be created, commissioned, and administered by the General Council in behalf of local churches in all three categories. Presumably the Council through its executive commission would also have the authority to negotiate concerning the disposition of board and staffs of the constituting denominations. Congregations, Presbyteries or Conferences would have the right of appeal to an "Appeal Agency" provided for in the Plan of Union. This seems to be the only channel of communication provided for whereby the local or regional units could make their voices heard by the agencies.

The Plan fosters separate boards for men and women presumably with fewer women's boards. There is no indication but that some of the work attempted might be in competition with that done by a board of the opposite sex. Only two representatives of the women's society would be on the executive commission. These would be matched by four secretaries of the general boards, probably men. Presumably also the ten ministers, ten laymen, and eight bishops would be men. The provision for separate boards and inadequate representation of women not only in the executive commission but also in Presbyteries, Conferences and the General Council constitutes one of the gravest weaknesses of the entire administrative structure.

There is possibly room in the Plan for some conflict between presbyterial state and national prerogatives in administrative affairs depending upon which lens of the ecclesiastical trifocals—congregational, presbyterial or episcopal—is used in interpreting the Plan of Union with regard to the limits of authority of the Presbytery, the Conference and the General Council. The General Council is given authority to project work in behalf of "constituent local churches, Presbyteries, and Conferences" and for more effective administration might consider "provincial or regional administrative units." A similar blanket authority seems to reside in the Conference at the state level. The Conference is authorized "to initiate such work with respect to the Presbyteries, the churches, and the people under their care as may tend to promote the edification of the church and the extension of the kingdom of God."

It is entirely conceivable that leaders holding to the concept of authority arising out of the local church may also attribute to the Presbytery or Conference responsibilities parallel but unrelated to the work sponsored by the General Council. The current trend toward statism among congregationally governed churches is a case in point.

Although the Plan definitely implies a centralized authority the broad powers assigned to the state or area conference plus the inclusion of constituent groups for whom centralized authority is distasteful may lead to real conflict between state and national administration.

One of the indeterminate factors in the Plan is the manner in which agencies are to be financed. Presumably the General Council could have authority to establish a promotional agency whose duty would be to finance all of the work of the boards, commissions, committees and organizations established by the General Council. The question then arises, would the promotional agent go directly to the local churches with assessments, or would quotas be assigned to conferences to be relayed to the local congregations? Still more pressing would be the question whether or not either the agent of the General Council or the Conferences could assess the congregationally governed churches for financial quotas, or whether all approaches could be on a purely voluntary, or "good will" basis. Or, to press the matter still further, would one type of church be assessed for its quota of support while another type is asked to volunteer what it would like to give? Basically it is the question of differing treatment for each of the three categories of churches embraced in The Plan.

One area of consideration in the Plan which needs further study is that with regard to the status and relationships of agency personnel to Presbyteries and Conferences. According to the Plan only ministers of local churches and lay representatives are members of the Presbytery. The Conference, in turn, is made up of representatives of the Presbyteries. Questions such as the following immediately arise: What is the relation of seminary faculty to the Presbytery which is "responsible for recruiting, preparing, and ordaining ministers" and what is the relation to the Conference in whose area the seminary is located? What status does either the institution or the faculty member have in the groups which determine program and policy?

Similar questions need to be raised regarding the personnel of the program agencies. Are agency personnel participants in the deliberations of the Presbytery which is responsible for "setting in order and promoting those things that pertain to the spiritual welfare and co-operative work of its constituent churches?" If so, what status do they have when present? In the same area, what channels of communication are open to the Presbyteries in order to make the program needs of the districts known to program personnel of the agencies?

Obviously not all the members of the faculty of a large seminary

could be voting members of a small Presbytery without dominating the decision being made. The same would be true of Presbyteries as the concentration of staffs of the program agencies in various centers. Nevertheless some working relationship and some bona fide status should be assured.

It would seem to the present writer that the Plan would be strengthened if the relation of the executive commission of the General Council to the agencies and boards of the communions expecting to merge were made explicit rather than left implicit. If the agencies of the various denominations considering the Plan were given some hint of constituting procedures for the union, and some idea of board mergers which might take place under the new arrangement much stronger backing for the Plan might be assured—or strong opposition. As it now stands the agency personnel of the various communions involved are left without any real sense of direction, or any consciousness of personal involvement regarding the United Church of Christ.

The current document shows remarkable insights and sensitivity regarding the differing concepts of local church administration and authority. It does not reflect the same careful treatment regarding agency life and administrative relationships. Procedures for creating new agencies without provision for negotiating with and merging old boards and agencies do not do justice to the important part played by state and national agencies in the life, work and thought processes of the local congregations. It is inconceivable, for example, that the merger could take place without the active good will of the various publishing houses, yet no procedures are suggested either for the continuation, liquidation or merger into the new corporate entity which is proposed.

The authority of boards and agencies needs to be made as explicit in the Plan as the relation of congregations to ecclesiastical structure has been set forth. Obviously, if the congregationally governed churches retain their autonomy with regard to the Presbytery and the Conference they retain it also with regard to the General Council. It would naturally follow that they would retain their autonomy in their relation to agency program, promotion and administration. At this point the question arises whether program approaches would need to be prepared for adaptation for all three types of congregations or whether a single approach from nationally created and administered boards would be attempted.

In section VI of the Plan it is suggested that after the United Church of Christ has been established a commission on study and

appraisal be appointed which would "review the progress of the union," and "encourage steps toward achieving higher levels of oneness in life and work and worship, and to propose such practical instruments of common life as a hymnal, a book of worship, orderly forms of worship, orderly forms of ecclesiastical procedure and the like." It should be pointed out that this step could well be taken in advance of the actual establishment of the United Church of Christ. If this were done as a step toward merger the program agencies, publishing houses, and staffs would begin developing a common language and a sense of mutual involvement before conventions and adjudicatory groups were faced with definitive decisions—perhaps negative—toward the Plan.

None of the difficulties or problems suggested in this article are insoluble. All of them, however, need to be brought into focus as the Plan is brought to the attention of the churches for consideration and modification.

THE GREENWICH PLAN AND THE STUDENT MERGER

By

RICHARD JOHNSON

THE Greenwich *Plan For a United Church* states as its "distinctive characteristic" the fact that the "essential features" of the polities of each of the churches involved would be preserved within the proposed United Church.

The *Plan of Merger of Several Student Christian Movements* is an attempt to merge the student movements involved while preserving their existing relationships to the parent communions. The latter plan grew out of an invitation issued in 1953 by the United Student Fellowship (the student movement of the Congregational-Christian and Evangelical and Reformed churches) for further exploration with any movement willing to talk seriously of closer unity. The invitation was not answered until 1955, when it was accepted by the Disciples Student Fellowship and the Westminster Student Fellowship (Presbyterian, U.S.A.). Later, the invitation was accepted by the Methodist Student Movement.

Since several of the same denominations are represented in both negotiations (the Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Congregational-Christians, Evangelical and Reformed, and Presbyterian U.S.A.), questions have arisen as to the relationship of the two plans. The following attempt to determine the relationship is, of course, based on my own interpretation of the plans, and begins with some specific presuppositions. The Greenwich plan used is the printed Revised Draft of May 22, 1953. The copy of the student plan is the *Plan of Merger of Several Student Movements and Study Guide*, issued in November of 1956.

I. *Both Plans Presuppose the Given Unity of the Church and Should Affirm it More Forcefully.*

The student plan begins with a basis and aim which sees the call to unity as a more adequate expression of our given unity. "We believe that we are called to the union of our campus Christian movements as a more adequate expression of our unity in the Church."¹ It speaks clearly of the historical basis and continuity of our faith. "The basis of the United Campus Christian Fellowship is the faith, attested by the Holy Scriptures and affirmed in the confessions and life of

¹ Student Plan, p. 7.

the Church, that God incarnate in Jesus Christ and present in the Holy Spirit wills to reconcile men to Himself, and that He is acting in history, creating, judging and redeeming."² Yet the basis contains no clear statement of the dynamic aspect of our faith. It is possibly implied by speaking of the Holy Spirit in the above quote, and is certainly assumed as the structure of the plan is developed, but the basis would profit by a stronger statement of this element. Without it, the basis is one-sided.

The sections which set forth the theological basis of the Greenwich plan, "The Divine Imperative," "The Common Faith," and "The Covenant of Unity," lack sharpness and clarity. A Christocentric basis is stated by saying, "Through our common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we are made one body in Him and, in penitence for our present unhappy separation from one another, we believe that our Master now calls us to transcend those barriers which divide us into various and often competing denominations and churches."³ But the statement is not given the prominent place which it deserves. The plan speaks of the historical nature and the need for historical continuity of faith: "We are One in common faith of the Christian Church and in our desire to share as a common heritage, the various storied and treasured expressions of that faith."⁴ There are various passages which speak of the dynamic nature of that faith, e.g., "We are one in that spirit of love which, owning the same Lord, recognizes diversity of gifts, concerns, and ministrations, and assumes to all freedom in ways of worship and of witness."⁵ ". . . seeking union with Christ with that Christian liberty of conscience and organization . . ."⁶ Yet these statements need to be pointed up and clarified. Both plans should say more about the idolatry of our present division and perhaps the chief Divine Imperative.

How might the plans set forth a clearer basis? It has become apparent in ecumenical conversations that the basis for our unity must be our faith in Jesus Christ. At Lund the churches said, "Christ has made us His own and Christ is not divided. In seeking Him we find one another."⁷ Again in the Faith and Order report at Evanston they said, "The New Testament conceives of the unity of the Church not sociological, but as having its essential reality in Christ Himself

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³ Greenwich Plan, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷ Tompkins, Oliver, ed. *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order* (London: SCM Press, 1953) p. 60.

and His indissoluble unity with His people.”⁸ If we are to find unity it will be in our common commitment to the Person of Christ.

But the question naturally arises, “What do we mean by this faith in Christ?” In answer we need not make objectifying statements about His nature. If such statements become crystallized and static they may contribute to our division. But while a dogmatic or doctrinal formula may be undesirable, any successful plan for unity must have a clear theological basis. The answer to dogmatism is not to be found in discarding theology, but in keeping the theology alive and flexible rather than static and rigid. In this direction, I suggest three statements about our faith in and commitment to the Person of Christ. (1) It is a faith which is historical in that God’s revelation in Christ was given in history. How else could such a revelation have meaning for man except as it entered into the plane on which he lives?⁹ (2) This faith must have some form of historical continuity in order that it may truly be preserved. (3) It is a faith which is dynamic. The faith of which we speak is a personal commitment to the Person of Christ. Relationships between persons are always dynamic.

It is because this personal commitment to God’s personal revelation in Christ stands at the center of our faith that we are compelled to seek unity. Division is sin because it denies the centrality of Christ. Unity is given in our common faith in Him. If we remain divided over other issues, by implication we give greater importance to them than to our common faith in Christ who draws us together.

It was to a situation of division among the members of the Corinthian Church that Paul devoted part of his first letter to them. The division enraged Paul for these parties had set themselves up as gods instead of looking to the true God in which they should have been one. “For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? For when one says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not merely men?” (I Cor. 3:3b-4). So we in our division make idols

⁸ Visser ‘t Hooft, W.A., ed. *The Evanston Report* (New York: Harpers, 1955) p. 83.

⁹ The Church learned early in its life that whenever its historical basis was forgotten or denied, e.g., the Gnostic heresy, something very important to its life and faith was lost. I am aware of the skepticism of the Form Critics as to what we can know of the historical incidents of Jesus’ life. But the point here does not depend on the historicity of any single incident in His life, but upon what is perhaps more important, the fact that He did live in history. It is one of the merits of the Christology worked out by John Knox in *On the Meaning of Christ*, that his Event of Jesus Christ does not depend on any single event in the life of Jesus.

of our own concerns which divide us, instead of looking to Him in whom unity is given.

I. *The Necessity for Community and the Merged Fellowship as a Community of Faith Within the Churches.*

What life have you if you have not life together?

There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of God
Even the anchorite who meditates alone . . .
Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ incarnate.¹⁰

Many have felt that the kind of personal commitment mentioned above leads to a purely individualistic faith. On the contrary, by its very nature a personal commitment to Christ necessitates community. A dynamic, living, personal revelation can live and be conveyed only in community. Emil Brunner, who has stressed a personal encounter with God in Christ writes, "the community as bearer of the Word and Spirit of Christ precedes the individual believer. One does not first believe and then join the fellowship: but one becomes a believer just because one shares in the gift vouchsafed to the fellowship."¹¹

It is in community where we ourselves have found a commitment to Christ. All of us are dependent on others for our own faith—upon those who have recorded their response on the pages of the New Testament—and upon men of faith in history and today, through whom we have been brought to a commitment to Christ. If this be true, then we also have a responsibility to share our faith with others. It is this mutual responsibility and common faith which brings us together in the community of the Church.

Both plans are aware of the necessity for the community of the Church. In the Greenwich plan, churches are coming together for fuller community. The student movements are not themselves churches, but expressions of the churches on the campus. As a community of faith within the church, they have been sensitive throughout to the necessity for maintaining close ties to their parent communions.

The danger in such a union of student movements is that the product may be non-denominational. There may be a need for such a group, but it is already being met by the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A.

¹⁰ Eliot, T. S., "Choruses from 'The Rock'" in *Collected Poems*, 1909-35. Quoted in Nelson, J. Robert, *The Realm of Redemption* (Greenwich, Conn: Seabury, 1951) pp. 63, 64.

¹¹ Brunner, Emil, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953) p. 11.

From the start the students have sought to create a plan for a real inter-denominational fellowship which will be the student movement of each of the parent communions. They state that two of their aims are: "To provide for effective growth and participation of members of the campus Christian community in the life and work of the churches"¹² and "To receive the nurture of the church and at the same time to enable the United Campus Christian Fellowship to be a prophetic voice within the life of the churches, pioneering on all frontiers of faith and work."¹³ Again they state, "It will be the objective of the UCCF that students and faculty of the Fellowship will continue in the public worship and instruction of the churches of their choice whether in the campus community, or in their home communities. Every effort must be made to increase their sense of identification with and participation in the life and work of the churches. At the same time the UCCF will remain responsive to the stated convictions and pronouncements of these communions and sensitive to the experiences of their members in worship and program."¹⁴

The action regarding the merger which the DSF executive committee will propose to next summer's Ecclesia spells out in concrete terms the ways in which the merged group will be related to the Disciples of Christ. We expect the other student movements to do the same. Of course, to a large extent the success of such an attempt depends on the parent communions themselves—on whether they are willing to take responsibility for and view the merged group as their own student movement. Given the cooperation of the parent denominations, there is no reason why a merged student movement cannot become a real interdenominational fellowship which draws the students even closer into the midst of these communions.

III. *The Unity of the Merged Student Fellowship and the United Church Taking Visible Form.*

We have seen already our compulsion for unity. It is given in Christ. To deny it is to deny Him. But to say that this unity must be one of organization may seem to some to go too far. There is no easy answer here. More important, there must be no final one. We must always remain sensitive to new directions in which God may call us to express our unity. Yet it seems imperative that we give serious consideration to some form of organizational unity as a possible direction in which He is calling us.

¹² Student Plan, p. 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

J. S. Whale writes of the Church that

. . . empirically considered, it is necessarily visible and institutional. This wonderful and sacred mystery is mediated to us through the visible and empirical; sacred Scriptures; sacred rites and sacraments, the outward, visible and efficacious signs of inward and spiritual realities; sacred offices of Christian ministry; sacred seasons, buildings, forms. Life in the spirit is never disembodied; it is incarnate in a Body whose organs are Word, Sacraments and Ministry.¹⁵

Just as God's revelation in Christ needed a visible, historical expression in the incarnation, so our unity must find a visible means to express itself. The Church is a Divine Community, but its members are human. As such we cannot escape human categories, forms, and modes of expression. Certainly such unity would be meaningless without also the bonds of the Spirit. But as Whale says, "Life in the spirit is never disembodied."

The student plan and the Greenwich plan are based on such a conviction. They are attempts at a unity of organization. Yet both have been aware that the body can live only with the spirit, and have also been concerned that this community find a vital spiritual oneness. Indeed it was a unity of the spirit which has brought them together.

V. *Diversity in the Merged Fellowship and in the Churches.*

Most of those who fear what has been called organic unity, do so because of the danger that such a church would destroy the individuality of its members. Such a danger can be avoided by drawing a strong distinction between a community and a collectivism. An organization which demands uniformity is a collectivism. In such a group the individual is stifled and choked. The institution is all-important. Of this kind of unity we can agree with John Knox that "If by 'unity' we mean perfect harmony, the complete absence of differences in practice and opinion among Christians, identity of theological emphasis, absolute uniformity in worship, and the like, it is clear that such 'unity' not only is impossible but ought not even to be desired—that is, within history. We are not good enough or wise enough to be thus united."¹⁶

¹⁵ Whale, J. S., *Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: University Press, 1956) p. 140.

¹⁶ Knox, John, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) p. 152.

But the unity of a community is "in musical terms, one of harmony, not of unison."¹⁷ In a Christian community the individual finds his true fulfillment. As he comes together with others of different beliefs, who are still one with him in commitment to Jesus Christ, his own faith grows and matures. A Christian community does not demand that we all understand our commitment to Christ in the same terms. It demands rather that such a commitment be made. In the words of J. Robert Nelson, "Rather than opposing the Church to individualism, therefore, we look upon the Church as the complement and summation of individual experience, which is still not equal to, but more than, the sum of the individuals who are members of it."¹⁸

We have already quoted those statements from the Greenwich plan which give expression to this dynamic aspect of our faith. We have also observed that such a statement is lacking in the written basis of the student plan. But both plans are aware of this element as they work out their structure. The Greenwich plan provides for the continuance of all three of the types of polity represented in the participating churches, within one structure. Uniformity is nowhere demanded. By its very nature the student plan must allow for differences. As long as the parent communions remain separate, uniformity is not only undesirable, but impossible.

V. *The Approach to Unity in the Two Plans.*

Even after the marriage of the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements in the World Council of Churches, there remains a certain tension between the two approaches. This seems to me an artificial division. Either approach is doomed to failure without the other. The attempt to discuss problems of life and work inevitably leads us back to a discussion of the theological basis for what we do.¹⁹ Yet the life and work approach has often been a refreshing influence when efforts to find a common faith have reached a stalemate.

We cannot really say that one of these approaches precedes the other. By life we mean the life within the church as a Christian community. By work we mean the church's outreach into the world. By faith we mean the way in which we conceive God's revelation in Christ and our response to it.²⁰ By order we mean the polity and

¹⁷ Temple, William, *The Church Looks Forward* (New York: Macmillan, 1944) p. 27.

¹⁸ Nelson, J. Robert, *The Realm of Redemption* (Greenwich: Seabury, 1951) p. 176.

¹⁹ See Visser 't Hooft, W. A., and Oldham, J. H., *The Church and its Function in Society* (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Co., 1937) p. 78.

²⁰ I would personally argue that the Biblical view of faith is the commitment itself, but in this context it is usually used as we have defined it above.

sacraments of the church. *Faith* gives impetus to *work*—yet it is through *work* (the church's outreach into the world) that we often find *faith*. Through *order* we maintain *life*. Yet *order* without *life* is meaningless. Through *order* we are called to *work*. Yet *order* (the sacraments, etc.) without *work* is hypocrisy. We are brought to *faith* through our *life* in Christian community. Yet we can find true *life* in community only as it is based on a vital *faith*.

Life, work, faith, and order are all expressions of our commitment to Christ. If any element is emphasized to the exclusion of another, it may become an idol which we substitute for such a commitment. In part, the success of any plan will depend on how well it is able to achieve a balance between these elements and preserve their unity.

Earlier we noted that the theological basis for each plan needed clearer statement, so perhaps this element is weak in each. In regard to the other elements, the Greenwich plan has not yet reached a stage to say much about joint work, program, etc. Of necessity at this point, it has given major emphasis to church order. Since the student movements are not churches, they have not needed to spend such a major portion of their time on order. For this reason they have been able to move to the area of joint work and program. Here the two plans would seem to complement one another, and it is possible that the students may be able to do some experimenting with joint program which will aid the writers of the Greenwich plan.

VI. *The Student Merger and the Plan of Union Anticipate a Greater Unity of the Church.*

One of the dangers of viewing unity as a human achievement is that the pride and self-satisfaction which follow may dull our sensitivity to God's voice as he calls us in new directions. At best, our plans for unity can be only partial expressions of that unity for which He is calling. Not only should we constantly be seeking to find more inclusive manifestations of the unity of the church, but we must also be aware that the directions which we have chartered may not be the ones in which God is calling us. Any union which is more interested in itself than in the voice of God has fallen into the same idolatry of those who allow their own concerns to divide them.

It is one of the strongest aspects of both plans that they have sought to remain sensitive to new opportunities for unity. The student plan states, "We understand that it will remain our responsibility to work for close relations with all student Christian movements and

that we must remain sensitive to the opportunities that God provides for the fuller manifestation of the unity which is ours in Christ."²¹ They list as one of their aims, "To further conversations with our fellow campus Christian movements, sensitive to the imperative for unity in mission and aware that our own union is only a partial realization of that unity for which our Lord is calling; and to make it possible for communions without organized campus Christian movements to share in the mission of the Church within colleges and universities."²² The drafters of the Greenwich Plan state

We look forward in faith and hope to a more comprehensive union than that envisaged by our present undertaking. Holding this faith and this larger hope, but not waiting for its full realization, we are convinced that we should now form ourselves into an organic union; and that our union must be so truly ecumenical in spirit and structure that it may be not only a Church united in itself but so manifestly inspired with a fervent desire and intention to be used of God that it will bring about a more comprehensive union.²³

Thus, while there are rough edges yet to be smoothed in both plans, as a whole they are honest, sincere, thoughtful attempts to hear the voice of God as he calls us to unity. They find a large measure of agreement in their basic approach. Where they differ they appear to supplement one another. We should see each as a valid opportunity to further express our unity in Christ.

We should also look to the student merger as an experiment in the kind of unity envisaged in the Greenwich Plan. It is well known that W. A. Visser 't Hooft, John R. Mott, and others who have been leaders in the World Council of Churches, were formerly leaders in the World's Student Christian Federation. It was in the European Student Christian Movements that the distinction between non-denominational and inter-denominational was first worked out. In the same way, the student merger may well become the testing ground for a union which will bring together their parent communions.

²¹ Student Plan, p. 7.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²³ Greenwich Plan, p. 6.